

**Laboured Sexualities:
The Experiences of Young Queer People in the
Workplace**

Submitted by

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy (Social Work)

University of Tasmania, January 2009

Declaration of originality

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Paul Willis
31st January 2009

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Acknowledgements

Like any other story, this thesis incorporates many voices. First, I wish to acknowledge the dedication and generosity of the thirty-four young people who shared their experiences of the workplace with me, either in person or on-screen, and whose stories lie at the heart of this thesis. Your wisdom and insight is deeply appreciated.

Three key people guided me through this journey: Professor Robert Bland, Ms Cecilia Craft and Associate Professor Barbara Baird. As co-supervisors, Robert and Cec have provided me with constant support, guidance and feedback. In particular, I appreciate their dedication to this topic and their unwavering willingness to accompany me along the way, despite the occasionally bumpy moments. In her role as research supervisor, Barbara has steered my reading through the sometimes-baffling terrain of gender studies, lesbian and gay studies and queer theory as well as kindly continuing to review my work after relocating to Flinders University. To all three supervisors, thank you for your support, guidance and friendship.

Several people have contributed their expertise to this research. In particular, thank you to Mia Barnett for her graphic design skills and to Damien Collins for his IT wisdom. Both these people were invaluable to this project going ‘online’. I am also grateful to Suzanne Pennicott-Jones for proofreading my work and for offering advice on formatting.

When you are continually writing and thinking about the sexual politics of the workplace, it often invites you into scrutinising your own work-relationships. Studying and working at the School of Sociology and Social Work at the University of Tasmania has only brought me many valued friendships and colleagues. In particular, I appreciate the collegiality of Rowland Atkinson, Della Clark, Lyn Devereaux, Denise Jones, Nicole Asquith, Douglas Ezzy and Louise North in Hobart, and Karen Willis, Debbie Smith and Celmara Pocock in Launceston.

Undertaking this study has also been a wonderful opportunity to forge new-found friendships with other postgraduate students whose mutual support, laughter, coffee breaks and conversation have been an integral part of my postgraduate experience—

thank you Ebony Wood, Felicity Picken, Trish Laddrack, Emily Bishop, Torna Pittman, Ellie Francis-Brophy, Nicole Schneiders and Tom Gunn. This includes my postgraduate pal outside the school, Paul Levett.

There are three friendships that I hold close to my heart and feel the richer for having these people in my life. It has also been a delight to undertake our postgraduate studies together. Thank you to Sonya Stanford, Margaret Hughes and Nick Hookway. May the gift of inappropriate and irreverent laughter always be with you!

A warm thank you must go to my family members whom I have continually 'outed' throughout my vocational endeavours in the queer arena and who have been rock-steady in their support. In particular, I recognise the support of my dad who I know has sometimes experienced this as a hard journey to accompany me on and whom I respect more so for having taken it. I extend my appreciation to my partner Michael for his patience, support and love.

Finally, this thesis is dedicated to the memory of Simon, a young gay man whom I befriended at the beginning of this journey and who chose to end his life before its completion. It is an honour to have spent the short amount of time we had together.

Abstract

This thesis is an investigation of how young people experience the workplace as queer (non-heterosexual) workers in the Australian labour market. Previous studies discuss the workplace as a problematic space for queer workers, depicting a site of discrimination, harassment and abuse on the grounds of sexuality. It can be argued that the workplace is configured as a sexual and gendered environment in which heterosexual expressions and relationships are frequently privileged over other sexual subjectivities. The voices of young people are predominantly absent from the literature examining queer sexualities in the workplace, despite their unique position as newcomers to the labour market. Thus, the aims of my research were to learn how young queer people experienced their place of paid employment in the Australian labour market and to examine how organisational dynamics affected their working lives. Addressing these aims through a constructivist methodology, I invited young queer people to share their accounts of former and current work environments. Thirty-four (34) young people aged 18 to 26 years participated through three qualitative methods: web-based surveys, online interviews and face-to-face interviews.

The findings of this study show that young queer people experienced the workplace across five interdependent dimensions as: 1) sexually exclusive spaces; 2) regulatory spaces; 3) silencing spaces; 4) inclusive spaces; and 5) sexually diverse spaces. Across these dimensions, young people participated in both enabling and constraining environments. Negotiating constraining work environments constituted a secondary form of labour for young queer workers as they faced adverse challenges in sustaining supportive and safe work-relationships with other organisational participants. Conversely, working in enabling work environments brought opportunities to form supportive and validating relationships with other organisational participants. Within their accounts of the workplace, young queer people were positioned as victims of symbolic and material violence, as agents of change in resisting and refuting homonegative discourse, and as equal and valued employees. This thesis concludes that while working across the multi-dimensions of the workplace presents complex challenges for young queer workers, it also generates solutions for the development of inclusive work environments. Accordingly, the findings of this study hold implications for change in policy and practice in the field of workplace diversity, and for extending social work knowledge in the field of sexuality.

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PREFACE

Research beginnings

The topic of this thesis, the location of young queer people in the workplace, has its origins in personal biography. This study evolved from my reflections on previous work experiences as a young gay-identifying man in early employment. My experiences as a non-heterosexual employee constantly shifted across workplace environments. In some workplaces, I discussed my intimate relationships and attractions for men with other staff members; in other organisations, I actively identified myself as ‘gay’. In one workplace I avoided all discussions about sexuality. As a casual employee in the retail industry, I frequently worried as to whether I would lose work-hours if management knew they had a ‘gay’ worker in their midst. Conversely, I sometimes wondered whether I was receiving additional work hours *because* management perceived and likened me to a non-heterosexual employee. Attempting to read the silences and unspoken sexual assumptions embedded within work-relationships was, and still is, vexing work.

My first employment as a new graduate in social work was as a Counsellor and Community Development Worker for a sexuality support service. Within this organisation, it was an informal expectation that I identify both professionally and personally as non-heterosexual. Regardless of how I chose to describe or articulate my sexuality, my body and identity were continually read as ‘non-heterosexual’ by clients and service providers alike who affiliated me with the service. I often pondered what it would be like to identify abruptly as ‘straight’ or to enter a different-sex relationship. Would I lose credibility with clients and community members? Would other service providers not feel as safe and secure in knowing how to make sense of or categorise my sexuality?

As a graduate social worker, I observed how the levels of acceptability and permission to speak and openly identify as a ‘gay’ employee varied between work-relationships. This was most obvious during my employment as a School Social Worker in primary school settings—while this knowledge was often present in staffroom conversations with other employees and senior staff, I generally avoided this discussion in my interactions with children and their families. This was despite, and in many ways because of, the continually voiced assumptions of me as a heterosexual subject from the perspectives of children and their parents and carers. Instead, I attempted quietly to correct their

assumptions through other signifiers, for example, dogmatically sticking to inclusive and gender-neutral language in my interactions.

One symbolic experience remains with me from this former employment. During the course of a regular working day, I received a gentle yet clear directive to remove an anti-homophobia poster from my office wall because it constituted ‘inappropriate material’ for primary students. The suspect poster itself was centered on name-calling and homophobia, for example ‘fairy’, ‘queen’ and ‘lemon’; a topic that I considered well-suited to school playground settings. For the senior staff member concerned the ensuing conflict represented a small quarrel over posters and office décor; for me it raised painful questions of whether I was likewise perceived as an ‘inappropriate’ employee to work with children.

These experiences led me to reflect on several key questions: how is it that I describe, perform and speak of my sexuality in different ways across different workplaces and work-relationships? Why do I feel that it is permissible for me to speak about and identify as a gay man in some work environments and relationships and not others? What are other young people’s experiences as non-heterosexual employees? These questions motivated me to pursue this topic through postgraduate research. It is timely to re-visit these questions as I begin to pursue a career path in academia.

More recently, I was saddened to hear a colleague comment on how they had resigned themselves to editing out references to gays, lesbians and queer-related issues in their curriculum vitae as a means of increasing their career opportunities in academia. In other words, cloaking their research endeavours in the field of lesbian and gay studies. This conversation was another sharp reminder that my idealistic assumption of universities as liberal spaces was highly suspect. It also made me consider whether embarking on a scholarly career in the field of lesbian and gay studies was perhaps counter-intuitive. In addition, I have often anxiously wondered how this research would be received by other audiences, fearing that it would be dismissed as the self-indulgent, narcissistic and inherently biased pursuits of another ‘gay’ researcher doing ‘gay’ research. David Halperin (1995, p. 139) argues that assuming a speaking position as a ‘politicised gay male’ can raise questions for audiences on the credibility and legitimacy of the author and their work. Like Halperin (1995), I do not wish to be dismissed as a ‘professional

gay polemicist' (p. 138) or pretend that my personal biography and political interests are not enmeshed within the research narrative. My personal commitment to lesbian and gay activism places me in an ideal position to advance this field through research. Jan Fook (1999, p. 15) regards the researcher's personal investment in the research as essential to mobilising resistance against oppressive social arrangements.

Brazenly and unashamedly, this thesis is founded on my self-interests and my desire to achieve two goals through social work research. My first goal is to produce a thesis that has a transformative function in raising and extending recognition for the rights of young queer people as paid workers, and to further appreciation for the potential challenges encountered from their entry into the workplace. My second goal is to explore through this thesis how workplaces can operate as inclusive environments for the diverse sexualities of paid workers. Echoing Jeffrey Weeks' (2004, p. 19) comments on the challenges of diversity, while the recognition of diversity in organisational life is often undeniable, the valuing of diversity is far less easily achieved.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Introduction to the chapter

The people you work with are people you're just thrown together with. You don't know them, it wasn't your choice, and yet you spend more time with them than you do with your friends or your family. But probably all you've got in common is the fact that you walk around on the same bit of carpet for eight hours a day.

Tim from 'The Office',
BBC Television 2003.

As Tim poignantly states, the workplace can function as a site of compulsory working relationships in which we have limited choices about whom we work with. It can also be a site of productivity and income generation as well as a site of connection to meaningful employment, notions of citizenship and identity, and significant relationships. The contemporary workplace is also recognised as a site of social inequality. For non-heterosexual workers, amongst other social groups, it can represent a space of social division, oppression and exclusion based on social and sexual hierarchies perpetuated within organisational cultures. This social work thesis is an examination of how young people experience and negotiate queer sexualities in their workplaces.

The purpose of this introductory chapter is four-fold. First, it introduces the research problem and outlines the aims and central research question for the thesis. Second, it presents the theoretical framework of the thesis and the key concepts that underpin the research question. Third, it locates the thesis in the field of critical social work and articulates how this study contributes to social work knowledge in the field of sexuality. Fourth, it outlines the structure of the thesis and presents a summary of the research narrative.

Introducing the research problem

A large proportion of our individual lives is spent at work. Extended hours of work have gradually increased for full-time workers in Australia over a twenty-year period (Barrett, Burgess & Campbell 2005). Recent findings from the Australian Work and Life Index (Pocock, Skinner & Williams 2007) suggest that work is frequently given priority over other aspects of daily living. Over half of the total respondents (52.6%) indicated that work 'sometimes, often or almost always' impacted on their activities outside the workplace, with 60.7% of total respondents reporting that work interferes with their time spent with family and friends (Pocock, Skinner & Williams 2007).

The workplace, or place of paid employment, is more than a site of productivity or financial reward; it also serves as a source of community and identity (Schultz 2003). Work brings individual lives' meaning and legitimacy; it connects people to notions of social citizenship and identity, as active and positive contributors to their communities and the state (Hearn & Lansbury 2005). Participation in meaningful employment contributes to the sense of worth, value and 'character' of individual workers. It holds significance for the development of personal traits that we value in others and ourselves (Sennet 1998, p. 10). Financial earnings generated from work are a fundamental source of economic wellbeing and participation in Western consumer cultures (Klawitter 2002, p. 329). Consequently, changes in the labour market not only affect an individual's economic wellbeing but also lead to a rewriting of individual identity-narratives: 'to lose a job is to lose a strong element in our sense of identity; a loss that also erodes our sense of participation in society' (Hearn & Lansbury 2005, p. 259).

There have been a number of significant changes in Western economies and the contemporary labour market in the last decade. One of the most notable shifts has been from a job-for-life to a flexible and fragmented market (Beck 2000; Bauman 1998; Sennet 1998). The bane of working in a 'flexible labour market', which no longer rests on values of commitment and dedication, threatens not only the financial and psychosocial welfare of individual workers but is also symbolic of a growing social divide (Bauman 1998):

Work that is rich in gratifying experience, work as self-fulfillment, work as the meaning of life, work as the core or the axis of everything that counts, as the source of pride, self-esteem, honour and deference or notoriety, in short, work as a vocation, has become the privilege of the few (p. 34).

Under what Sennet (1998) refers to as ‘New Capitalism’ in contemporary industrialised societies, the traditional working career has been replaced by a new working creed: ‘No long term’ (p. 22). As organisations favour flexible employment conditions, short-term and episodic labour emerges as the preferred model. Employees can no longer depend on their career for life; the coherency of individual working identities is lost as new social and economic anxieties emerge (Sennet 1998). New characteristics of the contemporary labour market such as flexibility, insecurity and instability are symbolic of what Beck (2000) notes as a global shift in deregulated market values and capital. This global shift represents the ‘Brazilianization of the West’ (Beck 2000, p. 1). In the Australian labour market, this has resulted in significant challenges that threaten equal access to employment such as high rates of unemployment and under-employment, the growth of part-time and casualised or ‘non-standard’ employment, and the disproportional growth of the service sector in comparison to other work sectors (Burgess & Connell 2005).

While an increasingly destandardised labour market presents new challenges to contemporary workers, fair and equal participation in employment is still regarded as a basic entitlement within human rights discourse. This is originally expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

- (1) Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.*
- (2) Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.*
- (3) Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.*

(UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 – ‘Article 23’).

Over the last twenty years, growing concern has mounted for the unequal participation of two identity cohorts, amongst others, in Western labour markets—young workers and non-heterosexual workers.

The first dimension to the research problem is the location of young people in the contemporary labour market. Young people occupy a unique social position in the contemporary workforce as new players in an increasingly fragmented, destandardised and casualised labour market that no longer promises occupational certainty, job security or longevity (Burgess & Connell 2005; Gaston & Timcke 1999; McDonald, Bailey, Oliver & Pini, 2007; White & Wyn 2008). The vulnerability of young employees in a rapidly changing and increasingly flexible labour market is multifaceted. McDonald et al (2007, p. 63) argue that young workers are vulnerable across four key areas. Young people are vulnerable as workers on generally low levels of pay and through their location in insecure and casual employment. They are also vulnerable to employer exploitation as inexperienced employees with limited organisational authority. This level of vulnerability is heightened through the low quality of jobs occupied by young employees, which contribute little to their skills and knowledge base.

It may be argued that the notion of ‘precarious employment’ underpins these four areas. Precarious employment is a fundamental reality of young people’s participation in the workforce; it signifies their location in socially vulnerable positions of ‘low pay, employment insecurity and working-time insecurity’ (White & Wyn 2008, p. 174). White and Wyn (2008) contend that precariousness is not attached to working-class occupations and industries alone but is widespread throughout the labour market alongside the ‘expansion of highly flexible employment regimes’ (p. 177).

Young people face declining opportunities for secure, full-time and long-term employment in the Australian workforce (Jamrozik 1998; Wooden 1996, 1998). In 1966, young people accounted for 13.6% of employed workers; by 1995, this figure had dropped to 6.9% across all sectors of employment (ABS statistics cited in Jamrozik 1998, p. 76). Young people are participating in education for longer while their employment in part-time and casual labour has increased (Wooden 1998). From 2004–2005 young workers (15–19) were the most common (66%) age group to occupy part-time employment in comparison to older age groups (ABS 2006). ABS (2006) defines part-time employment as less than 35 hours during one reference week per month. Thirty-one percent (31%) of young workers aged 20–24 were likewise employed part-time (ABS 2006).

Age-based divides exist between young workers and older age groups across occupations. During 2004–2005, young workers in both age brackets (15–19 and 20–24) were overrepresented in elementary clerical, sales and service work in comparison to older age groups, with young people aged 15–19 the largest group employed in these low skilled occupations (ABS 2006). In sharp contrast, less than 1% of 15–19 year olds and 2% of 20–24 year olds were employed in manager and administrator occupations (ABS 2006). A condition of precarious employment is the location of young workers in ‘volatile’ industries such as retail and service work that provides low-skilled and low-paid employment (White & Wyn 2008, p. 175). These industries depend on skill-sets that require the presentation and performance of self, rather than the accumulation of specialised knowledge and skills. This type of work marks young employees as disposable workers (White & Wyn 2008).

Casualisation of the Australian workforce is a wider contemporary trend that affects young workers as the growth of temporary employment has increased across full- and part-time labour (Campbell & Burgess 2001; Gaston & Timcke 1999). Casual employment includes both full- and part-time on a non-permanent basis as the ABS defines casual employees as workers ‘...who are not entitled to either paid holiday leave or paid sick leave in their main job’ (ABS 2005a). ABS (2005a) reports that during 2003, forty percent (40%) of casual workers were young people aged between 15 to 24 years, accounting for two-fifths of the casual workforce. This trend is concurrent with the growing phenomenon of the ‘student-worker’: young people participating in tertiary

education while working part-time. The 'student-worker' phenomenon has resulted from socioeconomic changes such as increases in education participation, the high costs of pursuing tertiary education and expanding access to the casualised labour market (McDonald et al 2007, p. 61).

While the combination of flexible casual employment and post-secondary study may suit some young people, this does not detract from the differential conditions between permanent and casual employment. Casual labour is frequently correlated with under-employment and low income; casual employees often have fewer entitlements to work benefits and are usually easier to dismiss without the protection of state or federal jurisdictions (Gaston & Timcke 1999, p. 333; SA Unions 2005). In relation to working conditions, casual employment may provide very few training and career advancement opportunities and is often associated with inadequate occupational health and safety provisions (ABS 2005a). Watson (2005) labels casual employment as 'inferior jobs' based on the disproportional wage premiums and penalties between casual, permanent and fixed-term employment.

Casualisation of the workforce has emerged alongside processes of destandardisation in Western labour markets, presenting further challenges for young people in sustaining meaningful paid employment (Valentine & Skelton 2003). A fragmented job market has destabilised traditional pathways of training and moving into specific occupations; paid workers are now expected to occupy multiple roles in various work sectors across their vocational life-course. Retraining and switching occupations are now necessary realities for sustaining employment and surviving in organisations (Sennet 1998; Valentine & Skelton 2003). Fenton and Dermott (2006, p. 218) suggest that young people with the lowest skill-sets and educational qualifications are the most vulnerable to job fragmentation and the occupation of low-ranked and low-paid employment.

The second and most critical dimension to the research problem relates to sexual diversity in the workplace. Concerns over the equal treatment of non-heterosexual workers in the workplace have been investigated in a number of empirical studies. In reviewing the literature on lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) identities in the workplace, a common story emerges that depicts the workplace as a problematic setting for non-heterosexual workers. Workplace studies from economically advantaged nations such as

Australia, United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK) have conveyed collective accounts of abuse, discrimination and harassment against non-heterosexual employees (Asquith 1999; Badgett 1996; Chrobot-Mason, Button & DiClementi 2001; Colgan, Creegan, McKearney & Wright 2006; Druzin, Shrier, Yacowar & Rossignol 1998; Emslie 1998; Fassinger 1995; Frank 2006; GLAD 1994; Griffith & Hebl 2002; Humphrey 1999; Hunt & Dick 2008; Irwin 1999; Levine & Leonard 1984; McCreery & Krupat 1999; McCreery 1999; Powers 1996; Ragins & Cornwell 2001; Ragins, Cornwell & Miller 2003; Rondahl, Inyala & Carlsson 2007; Rostosky & Riggle 2002; Russ, Simonds & Hunt 2002; Shallenberger 1994; Skidmore 2004; Smith & Ingram 2004; Spradlin 1998; Taylor & Raeburn 1995; Waldo 1999; Ward & Winstanley 2003, 2006; Woods & Lucas 1993). Within these studies, the workplace is discussed as a site of social inequality and oppression founded on hierarchical divisions sustained between heterosexual and non-heterosexual workers.

The collective storyline threaded throughout these studies highlights the interpersonal, social and institutional challenges faced by non-heterosexual workers across industry and occupation. These challenges vary between workplace cultures, occupational settings and work-relationships, from overt experiences of homophobic abuse and discrimination through to more subtle yet painful expressions of heterosexism. This presents complex decisions for non-heterosexual workers around issues of self-disclosure and 'coming out' as part of their daily negotiations of visibility and identity management in the workplace (Anastas 1998, 2001; Badgett 1996; Chrobot-Mason, Button & DiClementi 2001; Clair, Beatty & Maclean 2005; Day & Schoenrade 1997, 2000; Gonsiorek 1993; Irwin 1999; Levine & Leonard 1984; Ragins, Singh & Cornwell 2007; Ward & Winstanley 2003, 2006; Woods & Lucas 1993).

Patterns of social inequality in the workplace prevent non-heterosexual workers from equally participating in the labour market and in consequence can economically disadvantage a significant proportion of the working population. Econometric studies in the US have previously refuted the stereotypical myth of middle-class affluence attached to lesbian and gay livelihoods and conversely suggested that queer workers face income inequities in comparison to their heterosexual counterparts (Badgett 1995, 1998, 2000; Berg & Lien 2002; Blandford 2003). In this study, I concentrate on vocational

experiences within the workplace as a central site of production, human organisation and paid employment.

The collective story of the workplace as a problematic setting is by no means representative of all queer workers' experiences; not all workplaces are experienced as heterosexist or homophobic environments. Numerous studies have also highlighted how the workplace can function as a sexually inclusive and supportive environment, as experienced and reported by non-heterosexual workers (Button 2001; Colgan et al 2006; Day & Schoenrade 2000; Huffman, Watrous-Rodriguez & King 2008; Irwin 1999; Ward & Winstanley 2006; Wright, Colgan, Creegan & McKearney 2006). In recognition of this variance in the social and sexual organisation of the workplace, I chose not to focus on one specific industry or occupational group in this study. Instead, I invited young queer people to share their individual accounts of working life from a range of workplace settings.

Meaningful participation in the workplace is a key contributor to individual identity formation and feelings of self-worth (Hearn & Lansbury 2005, p. 260). Emslie (1999, p. 161) argues that participation in social spaces such as the workplace bring young people opportunities beyond economic reward. Young people form relationships with others, make friends and feel accepted, and receive recognition and appreciation for their work-participation. If young queer people have to tackle issues of discrimination, stigmatisation and homophobia in their workplace because of their sexuality, they are deprived of these valuable contributions to their vocational and social development. It is the intention of this thesis to shed further light on their experiences of workplace participation.

In this research, I specifically focus on young queer people as opposed to older working populations. To my present knowledge the voices of young queer workers are chiefly absent from existing literature in both fields of youth and the workplace, and sexuality and the workplace. This thesis seeks to address these identified gaps.

The purpose of the study is to generate a detailed description of young queer people's experiences in the workplace from which new knowledge, and policy and practice can be generated. Accordingly, the aims of the research were:

- 1) To learn how young people experience their place of employment as queer workers;
- 2) To examine how organisational dynamics impact on the working lives of young queer people.

Based on these two aims, my research is both an exploratory and descriptive form of inquiry (Alston & Bowles 1998, p. 34). A qualitative methodology was selected as the most appropriate paradigm for undertaking this exploratory and descriptive inquiry in which the emphasis is on dense and detailed description and the identification of theoretical themes. This qualitative inquiry was guided by the following research question:

How do young people experience the workplace as queer workers?

In response to this question, I argue that as sexual and gendered environments, workplaces are socially configured and experienced as more than problematic spaces but as multi-dimensional spaces. I contend that the workplace is experienced by young queer workers across five dimensions as: 1) a sexually exclusive space; 2) a regulatory space; 3) a silencing space; 4) an inclusive space; and 5) a sexually diverse space. These five dimensions can have multiple effects, both constraining and enabling, over the work lives of young queer people. Negotiating these five convergent and divergent dimensions presents numerous challenges for young queer workers in sustaining supportive, productive and safe work-relationships with other organisational participants. This illustrates the labour of negotiating queer sexualities in the workplace. However, it also brings opportunities to form supportive and validating relationships with other staff who appreciate young people as queer workers. In the concluding chapter of this thesis, I build on these findings by discussing the implications for change.

Theoretical approach to the research

The theoretical framework for this inquiry is informed by three fields: lesbian and gay studies, queer theory and postmodern critical social work. These theoretical fields provided me with what Kincheloe and McLaren (2005, p. 306) describe as a conceptual map for exploring and appreciating the social world of young queer people in the workplace. In this discussion, I introduce these three fields.

Lesbian and gay studies

Contemporary lesbian and gay studies is a field of inquiry that critically examines oppressive social and institutional structures that sustain the marginalisation of non-normative sexual and gender identities (Kirsch 2006, p. 25). A central focus to this agenda is the cultural production of identity-based communities and collectives: ‘the term *lesbian and gay studies* (and, more recently, *lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender studies*) has typically been used to capture the study of these populations’ (Gamson 2003, p. 543, emphasis in original text). Lesbian and gay studies grew out of the identity-based social movements of the 1970s and 80s in economically advantaged nations. In modern Australian history, this encompasses gay liberation and HIV/AIDS collectives and social movements (Willett 2000). The development of feminist theory and activism has equally influenced this field of study (Gamson 2003, p. 46). As an academic discipline within universities, lesbian and gay studies has evolved from the silenced voices that have clamoured for public recognition amidst these historic movements (Kirsch 2006, p. 22).

While lesbian and gay studies have primarily focused on marginal sexual identities, cultures and communities, its theoretical and political underpinnings have been informed by numerous perspectives over the last forty years (Gamson 2003). From the 1960s onwards, lesbian and gay-identified research participants were invited to share their tales of ‘becoming’ a gay subject. Researchers sought to move away from pathological accounts of mental illness and disease and to reclaim queer sexualities as positive

contributions within a wider discourse of diversity (Kong, Mahoney & Plummer 2002, p. 242). This position was predominantly informed by essentialist perspectives.

Essentialist perspectives situate sexuality as a fixed human quality that is an innate part of the human self. Sexuality is premised as a natural and universal force, denying the social and cultural significance of sexual relationships (Rubin 1984, p. 275). This perspective was later reflected in the politics of the lesbian and gay rights movement during the 1980s. Lesbian and gay activists assumed an ethnic, nationalist model of identity that mirrored the appearance of other 'ethnic minorities' in clamouring for equal civil rights (Epstein 1998, p. 140; Seidman 1995, p. 124). Underpinning the notion of collective ethnicity is the assumption that lesbians and gays share 'the same fixed, natural essence, a self with same-sex desires' (Gamson 1995, p. 391). While essentialist perspectives on sexuality are diverse, they typically share a deterministic and reductionist basis in the key assumption that individual actions are explainable through 'inner propulsions' and innate sexual urges (Weeks 2003a, p. 7). Alternatively, social historian Jeffrey Weeks argues that sexualities are not 'a given' but a sociocultural 'product of negotiation, struggle and human agency' (Weeks 2003a, p. 19).

Positivist and essentialist assumptions informing lesbian and gay studies were challenged by what Gamson (2003, p. 548) describes as the 'constructionist turn' in social theory, which emerged from social studies in the 1970s. The social constructionist paradigm shifted the empirical gaze away from the individualistic focus implicit within essentialist definitions and relocated sexual categories and definitions as historically and culturally contingent (Connell & Dowsett 1992, p. 71). From this paradigm, sexuality is approached as a social field for investigating how erotic identities, meanings, and collectives are constructed and experienced. Constructionist positions on sexuality are not a unitary set of ideas. These ideas encompass social historical perspectives on the construction and representation of sexuality, and symbolic interactionist perspectives on the everyday interactions between individual actors as sites of sexual story-telling and meaning-making (Edwards 1997, p. 169; Gamson 2003, p. 549).

The more recent emergence of poststructural critique in the 1980s builds on the constructionist paradigm. A central proposition from poststructural theory is the questioning of the authentic sexual self, leading to the redefinition of contemporary

understandings of sexuality, and sexual identities, as relational, discursive and fragmented (Kong et al 2002). From this discursive position, constructionist perspectives have received criticism for resting on the assumption that the 'natural' human body and the individual subject exist prior to discourse. Conversely, poststructural authors argue that the body and the individual subject, or at least our understandings and interpretations of the two, are constituted through language and discourse (Mason 2002, p. 59). As Davies (1991) argues '...we can only ever speak ourselves or be spoken into existence within the terms of available discourses' (p. 42).

By discourse, I am referring to specific sets of ideas, assumptions and perceptions of the social world that are circulated across discursive fields of language and power:

...a regulated system of knowledge supported by social institutions, which constrain what can be spoken, how it may be spoken about, and who can speak it. Discourses produce positions from which people can speak as well as related social practices (Filax 2006, p. xvii).

Discourses are circulated through a series of competing meaning-systems and practices that privilege particular ways of thinking about the world while working to exclude or silence other discourses from being spoken (Mills 2003, p. 54). Discourses are the 'language practices' through which we interpret and act upon reality (Healy 2005, p. 199). From a critical feminist perspective, Weedon (1987) argues that 'discourses represent political interests and in consequence are constantly vying for status and power' (p. 41). Discourses are not abstract meaning-systems but serve, in part by constructing, political and dominant-group interests.

Queer theory

From the poststructural tradition queer theory emerged as a critical body of thought. Kirsch (2006, p. 25) argues that lesbian and gay studies constitutes a field of inquiry

while queer theory is an approach located within that inquiry. However, it needs to be acknowledged that the application of queer theory has been extended to the critique of wider social and cultural issues, including issues of race, nationality and citizenship (Schippert 2006; Sullivan 2003). Gamson (2003, p. 543) notes that in many ways queer theory represents the antithesis to lesbian and gay studies because of its poststructural critique of identity cohesion and stability. Queer theory can be broadly described as a critical standpoint for teasing apart dominant ways of knowing about sex, gender and sexualities. According to Plummer (2005, p. 359), 'queer' represents the 'postmodernisation' of sexuality and gender studies, favouring partiality, incoherency and contradiction through the examination of representation and text.

Queer theory has been heavily influenced by wider postmodern philosophy. Key philosophical strands in postmodern thought include the de-centering of the humanist subject, the intersections between knowledge formation and power relations, and the death of grand narratives in favour of localised, multiple and contested perspectives (Howe 1994; Kincheloe & McLaren 1998, p. 293; Nicholson & Seidman 1995, p. 8). From a poststructural standpoint, language is the constitutive basis through which we understand the social world (Alvesson 2002, p. 61; Richardson 1990, p. 12). Instead of providing alternative visions for re-organising society, poststructural thought centres on epistemology or ways of knowing: how we know, instead of what we know, and with what effect, emphasising the nexus between knowledge and power (Fook 2002, p. 16).

Queer theory emerged in the humanities in tandem with the rise of queer politics during the 1980s. Queer politics spawned from growing dissatisfaction with the limits of political representation in feminist, lesbian and gay collectives. Its origins also lie in the campaigning of HIV/AIDS activists seeking to shift the political focus from identity-based models of disease to instead, speaking of sexual behaviours and practices (Jagose 1996; Seidman 1995). Political expressions of 'queer' have involved public acts of parody and subversion, 'queering' popular culture and text and, more broadly, celebrating the liminal spaces that individuals occupy in the social and sexual margins (Seidman 1993, p. 133).

Queer theorists share a common aim in seeking to 'frustrate' and 'trouble' taken-for-granted ideas on gender and sexuality (Sullivan 2003, p. vi). This includes interrogating

the assumed normalcy of heterosexuality across everyday culture, popular text and mass media (Berlant & Warner 1995; Warner 1991, 1993). While the significance of 'queer' intentionally defies simplistic definition, its central purpose is to trouble conventional definitions of sexuality and gender and to embrace the impossibility of sustaining neat systems of sexual classification (Warner 1993, p. xxvi). This imperative to 'trouble' gender and sexual definitions and boundaries draws heavily from Michel Foucault's (1978) seminal discussion of sexuality as a political knowledge-structure and from Judith Butler's (1990; 1993) influential theorising of gender, sexuality and identity as performative constructs. These theoretical foundations are further discussed in Chapter Two.

Writers in the social sciences have expressed a number of criticisms about queer theoretical tendencies. Sociological authors have laid the criticism that the more abstract theorising of queer writers is greatly removed from the material and institutional realities of everyday lives (Edwards 1998; Stein & Plummer 1996). Stein and Plummer (1996, p. 137) have argued that queer theory's preoccupation with text, language and signification fails to consider how discursive constructs such as gender and sexuality are experienced in the material world. Similarly, Green (2002) has contended that queer theory disregards the ways in which sexual identities are embedded in social institutions and roles; it ignores social and material processes by which lesbian and gay subjects are brought 'together in shared communities and political struggles' (p. 523). In its defence, queer theory has its origins in disciplines such as cultural studies and literary theory, and as such has chiefly centered on text-based analysis (Edwards 1998). Furthermore, Gamson (2003) points out that queer tendencies and theories are now integrated into empirical studies of the social world. Nonetheless, as Gamson (2003, p. 357) argues, the queer destabilisation of sexual identity categories presents conceptual challenges to social researchers in conducting research with sexually identified individuals and groups.

From a social work perspective, McPhail (2004, p. 14) raises a key concern that the 'queer' deconstruction of sexual categories can undermine the collective power of social identities in generating community activism. Through the power of collective action, feminist and gay and lesbian liberation movements have achieved many successes in raising awareness and recognition of gender and sexuality-based inequalities. Social collectives are founded on political and personal alignments with identity markers and

historically, have been fundamental to achieving social and legal change: ‘...taking away that collectivity engenders fears that it will lead back to invisibility, lack of recognition and powerlessness’ (McPhail 2004, p. 14).

While acknowledging these criticisms, I believe that queer theory makes several key contributions to this study. The value of queer theory lies in its critical focus on the centre of socio-sexual organisation, the privileging of heterosexuality, as opposed to singularly focusing on sexual subjectivities located in the margins (Stein & Plummer 1996, p. 138). This is accompanied by a critical awareness of how conceptual binaries such as the heterosexuality/homosexuality binary sustain heteronormative assumptions and practices and wider sexual hierarchies (Sedgwick 1990; Seidman 1995). Likewise, the genealogical discussions of Michel Foucault (1977, 1978, 1980e) are invaluable to this inquiry. This value lies in the recognition of sexuality as a system of knowledge production and an instrument of power, and in tracing the development of disciplinary power in modern societies.

Postmodern critical social work and sexuality

Postmodern critical social work is a paradigmatic focus on structures of ‘domination, exploitation and oppression’ and aims to inform social work practices geared towards deconstructing dominant and oppressive systems of thought (Fook 2002, p. 18). Jan Fook (2002) discusses this theoretical paradigm in connection to wider social work commitments to social change and the development of more inclusive social arrangements. From this theoretical standpoint, postmodern strands are integrated into the critical social work model whereby recognition is given to the multiple and diverse constructions of the social world (Fook 2002, p. 18).

According to Karen Healy (2005), postmodern approaches to critical social work incorporate fundamental propositions from ‘post’ theory, including: discourse and language as central to human understandings of the self (p. 199); examinations of subjectivity rather than fixed identities (p. 200); the recognition of power as an ever-present and productive force (p. 202); and, the deconstruction of dualistic logic implicit

within modern thought (p. 205). Postmodernism invites social workers to rethink the privileging of expert knowledge bases that have previously informed practice and alternatively, centres on meaning as generated through dialogue between the people we work with and ourselves as social workers.

It is at this point that the social work literature speaks of *postmodernism* as opposed to *poststructuralism*. Jessup and Rogerson (1999, p. 163) note that poststructural thought is a critical stream emergent from broader postmodern theory, and discuss poststructuralism as more specifically concerned with the politics of language, discourse and power. Similarly, Alvesson (2002, p. 31) discusses postmodernism as a broader philosophical trend that encompasses poststructural critique while acknowledging that the two terms are often used interchangeably in the literature. For consistency with other social work authors (Fook 2002; Healy 2005; Pease & Fook 1999), I proceed by referring to postmodernism.

Postmodern critical social work ascribes to a 'weak' form of postmodernism that does not sway from emancipatory politics or its guiding principles of social justice, equity and equality (Pease & Fook 1999, p. 12). From this position:

...postmodern and critical social work is primarily concerned with practising in ways which further a society without domination, exploitation and oppression. It will focus both on how structures dominate, but also on how people construct and are constructed by changing social structures and relations recognising that there may be multiple and diverse constructions of ostensibly similar situations (Fook 2002, p. 18).

Incorporated within this standpoint is a commitment to addressing oppressive power relations that have both discursive and material effects for individuals, groups and communities. Resistance and change lie in the capacity to deconstruct and challenge dominant power relations and oppressive discourses (Fook 2002, p. 18).

Postmodernist ideas invite social work practitioners to value plurality and uncertainty in their practice, to respect diversity and human difference, to appreciate the localised

contexts of client problems, and to reflect on how workers' knowledge bases, beliefs and biases shape client interactions (Lane 1999, p. 146; Pease & Fook 1999, p. 11). As professionals occupying positions of authoritative power, social work practitioners need to consider how their practices and interventions not only shape client interactions but inscribe particular meanings, diagnoses and classifications to client's lives in often constraining ways (Howe 1994). In this sense, social work roles, practices and client-relationships are recognised as socially constructed (Healy 2005, p. 194). In critical reflection, the emphasis is on how particular kinds of 'clients' are constructed through practice interactions.

From the late 1990s, social work authors began to outline how critique from queer theorists and other postmodern theorists can enrich critical social work understandings of sexuality and gender diversity (Hicks & Watson 2003; Hicks 2005, 2008; Hughes 2006; LaSala 2007a; O'Brien 1999; McPhail 2004). This includes a critical examination of existing knowledge bases that have informed social work understandings of human sexuality. The integration of queer theory coincides with the increasing recognition of the limitations and problematic assumptions embedded in older models of social work practice with sexually diverse groups.

Despite the removal of homosexuality as a psychiatric disorder from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM II)*, American Psychiatric Association 1968) in 1973, writers from North America (Hylton 2005) and the UK (Brown 1998) argue that pathological ideas of homosexual deviance and disease continue to pervade social work knowledge and practice. In relation to young people, O'Brien (1999, p. 142) claims that ideas of homosexuality as 'pathological and predatory' have also informed social work texts during the 1980s. This body of social work literature has tended to represent youth sexuality as 'immature, dangerous, endangered and requiring the guidance of expert adults' (O'Brien 1999, p. 140). Within this framework, the sexualities of young people are positioned as either 'dangerous' or 'endangered'.

Popular social work models for working with sexually diverse groups have adopted an ethnic-based framework that represents non-heterosexual people as 'sexual minorities' (Hicks & Watson 2003; Hicks 2005, 2008). Within this framework, lesbians and gays are positioned in the same light as racially diverse groups, implying a sense of

‘sameness’ and homogeneity in their biological make-up. Hicks and Watson (2003) argue that liberal definitions of ‘identity’ have led to the ‘adding in’ of non-heterosexual populations to established practice models such as the culturally competent framework (Van Den Bergh & Crisp 2004) and Thompson’s (1997 cited in Hicks & Watson 2003) approach to anti-discriminatory practice. Contained within these models is the inherent assumption that social descriptors such as lesbian and gay *just are*. However, these labels are more than just descriptions of identity; they signify value-laden ways of thinking about sexuality within an essentialist framework (Hicks & Watson 2003; Hicks 2005, 2008).

According to O’Brien (1999), social work is implicated in the production of sexual categories and hierarchies, and hence ‘deeply implicated in the construction of power relations in sexuality’ (p. 151). The heterosexual/homosexual binary is a taken-for-granted framework embedded in social work theories for working with sexually diverse groups (O’Brien 1999, p. 144). O’Brien (1999, p. 150) identifies this binary as part of a wider discourse circulating in social work that perceives sexuality as simultaneously a ‘natural’ phenomenon and a social problem. McPhail (2004) recommends for social work to incorporate a sharper focus on deconstructing gender and sexual binaries in both practice and knowledge contexts, including the divisive operations of the heterosexual/homosexual binary. Similarly, Hicks (2008, p. 69) urges social workers to think beyond what he describes as the ‘four-sexuality’ rule: ‘lesbian’, ‘gay’, ‘bisexual’ and ‘heterosexual’, in which social work knowledge appears chiefly reliant (and restrained) on thinking through sexuality in terms of identity categories only.

Addressing the theoretical tensions

This study diverges from queer theory and is more in keeping with lesbian and gay studies and postmodern critical social work across two points of tension. The first point concerns this study’s focus on *young queer people as a specific population to be ‘researched’*. In this sense, my research encapsulates what queer theorist Eve K. Sedgwick (1990, p. 1) discusses as a ‘minoritizing’ perspective, in which I focus on young queer people as a sexually marginalised group. The second point concerns this

study's attention to *the lived experiences of young queer workers*. This approach is more in keeping with lesbian and gay studies more so than a 'queer' interrogation of sexual identity categories and processes of identity construction.

I elected to focus on the lived experiences of young queer people as a social group for two reasons. First, this position enabled me to privilege young people's accounts of being located in the sexual margins. A key objective for social workers engaged in critical research is to facilitate the expression of 'subjugated knowledge[s]': the voices of marginalised social groups whose knowledge and perspectives are discounted from dominant ways of knowing about the social world (D'Cruz & Jones 2004; Hartman 1992). Second, the experiential accounts of non-heterosexual people as socially marginal actors are fundamental for learning how institutional settings such as the workplace 'heterosexualise' and with what effects (Gamson 2003, p. 358). Members of marginalised social groups bring an interior perspective on the techniques and effects of social oppression that is not fully appreciated to the same extent by members of dominant social groups. As Humphrey (1999) argues, 'lesbians and gay men have been in a unique position to study the underbelly of their organisations—the sexual repressions buried in the organisational unconsciousness' (p. 146).

In conceptualising this study, I did not want to locate the research in a singular theoretical position but alternatively draw on critical elements from the three theoretical bases of lesbian and gay studies, queer theory and postmodern critical social work. In combination, these three knowledge bases provide essential tools for analysing and questioning homosexual oppression in contemporary societies. This is in line with a postmodern critical standpoint in social work in which the central purpose of practice and research interventions is to '[further] a society without domination, exploitation and oppression' (Fook 2002, p. 18).

Locating the research in critical social work and sexuality literature

This thesis contributes to the growing body of social work literature dedicated to advancing the interests of sexually marginalised groups in Western societies, and

developing the knowledge base of the profession in the field of sexuality (Appleby & Anastas 1998, 2004; Berkman & Zinberg 1997; Brown 1998; Bywater & Ryans 2007; Fish 2006; Hartman 1993; Langley 2001; Martin & Knox 2002; Morrow 1993, 2004; Roberts 2005; Trotter 2000, 2001; Van Den Bergh & Crisp 2004; Van Voohris & Wagner 2001). Martin & Knox (2002, p. 57) call for more inquiries in the field of lesbian and gay research to expand the knowledge base of social work education and to continue improving the provision of effective social work services to non-heterosexual clients. Other social work authors have identified significant and disproportional gaps in the literature on gay men and lesbians' everyday lives (Roberts 2005, p. 36; Van Voorhis & Wagner 2001). Social workers have ethical responsibilities to support what Jeane Anastas (1998) identifies as '...broader social and public policy efforts to eliminate all forms of violence and discrimination against gay, lesbian and bisexual people' (p. 94). This responsibility matches the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) Code of Ethics (2002) requirement for social workers to promote 'policies, practices and social conditions that uphold human rights and that seek to ensure access, equity and participation for all' (p. 11).

More specifically, this thesis is located in the growing body of critical social work studies that incorporate queer and postmodern strands. Some social work researchers have incorporated queer theoretical propositions into their analysis of practice fields, such as foster care and adoption (Hicks 2006), youth residential care (Barter 2006), gerontology (Hughes 2004b, 2006), and, in their critiques of wider political trends, such as current Western campaigns for same-sex marriage equality (LaSala 2007a). I have elsewhere argued that key ideas from queer theory can assist in the deconstruction of oppressive sexual narratives circulating within the life-stories of young queer people (Willis 2007). These writers demonstrate that 'queer' ideas can play a critical role in rethinking social work practice and pedagogy and in developing more inclusive models of practice. In a similar vein, this thesis incorporates a critical interrogation of heteronormative practices and the divisive operations of the heterosexual/homosexual binary within the social setting of the workplace.

Key concepts in the research

Defining 'young people'

In this thesis, the definitional parameters of 'young people' are set between 16 to 26 years of age. From a sociological perspective, the concept of 'youth' is best understood as a relational concept: 'youth' represent a constructed population in Western industrial societies, defined through prevailing social, historical and cultural processes (Wyn & White 1997, p. 10). Accordingly, age-based definitions of 'youth' vary between social and economic contexts. This presents difficulties in ascertaining a consistent and replicable framework for research inquiry. While there is considerable variance in definitions of 'youth' from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), the most common definition is between 15 to 24 years of age; in this time-span young people are recognised as economically dependent on adults (ABS 2005b). In this thesis, I have intentionally avoided references to the empirical term 'youth' that has previously been used to describe predominantly young white men engaged in risk-taking activities (Wyn & White 1997, p. 19). Alternatively, I refer to *young people* in equal recognition of young women and young men.

Defining 'queer'

For the purposes of this study, I adopt the term 'queer' as a descriptive reference to 'young people who may identify themselves as not straight' (Talbut, Rofes & Rasmussen 2004, p. 1). As an umbrella term, 'queer' is commonly deployed in reference to people whom self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (Hylton 2006). One challenge in conceptualising this study was determining the language in which to describe the sample group. Over the last twenty years the expression 'queer' has been reclaimed as an identity marker by queer activists seeking to demonstrate the power of reverse discourse by 'turning a repertoire of regulation into a category of resistance' (Mort 1994, p. 207). However, not all non-heterosexual people embrace the radical

politics of 'queer'. While 'queer' may be interpreted as inclusive to some young people, for others this term still carries homophobic connotations (Fraser 2004).

The theoretical basis of 'queer' was also appealing to my research. Speaking broadly, 'queer' can represent sexual expressions and subjectivities that stand outside the assumed normalcy of heterosexuality. The process of 'queering' is also discussed as a theoretical method for making 'strange' or troubling normative ideas about sexuality and gender (Sullivan 2003, p. vi). Each of the young people participating in this research described their sexual self as situated outside the gendered and sexual norms of heterosexuality, whether through reference to identity categories such as lesbian, gay or bisexual or by refusing to identify with these categories indefinitely. In volunteering to speak out and share their story as non-heterosexual subjects, this demonstrates to me what Filax (2006, p. xv) has recognised as the boldness of young people in refusing to be confined and silenced within the constraints of sexually normative boundaries. On this basis, I refer to *young queer people* in this thesis while recognising this term has variant meanings and application across other social studies and contexts.

Defining 'the workplace'

In this study, I approach the workplace as a shared space in which paid work is undertaken. Work is defined as a process of contracted, paid labour, which is chiefly performed through either particular tasks to be completed or the fulfilment of specific roles (Skidmore 2004, p. 229). Harris, White and McDonnell (1998, p. 100) recognise that young people participate in multiple economic spheres. Participants in this study shared their accounts of employment in *formal waged markets*, which were taxed and regulated by the state, and *informal waged markets*, often referred to as cash-in-hand work, which did not fall under state taxation (Harris et al 1998). Hence, I expanded the concept of the workplace to encompass places in which employment was undertaken through both formal and informal waged spheres.

Structure of the thesis

The structure of this thesis is in four parts. Chapters Two and Three constitute the first part, the literature review, in which I focus on the background literature to the research problem. Chapter Two outlines the socio-cultural context to young queer people in the workplace. This chapter focuses on how sexuality and social oppression in Western societies has been conceptualised and critiqued and lays out the theoretical context for this thesis. In the latter half of Chapter Two, I examine the dominant narrative-streams that represent the sexual lives of young queer people and the ways in which their everyday lives are represented and discussed within the social sciences. In Chapter Three, I review the existing literature on queer sexualities in the workplace. This chapter fleshes out the nuances of the research problem through its focus on the operations of the workplace as a sexual environment, the problematic presence of queer workers in the workplace, and the macro, mezzo and micro mechanisms applied in developing inclusive work cultures.

Chapter Four, the second part of this thesis, outlines the methodological approach and design elements of the research. In this chapter, I describe how I applied a constructivist methodology to my research and I chart the three qualitative methods deployed to investigate the research problem: web-based surveys, online interviews and face-to-face active interviews. I then describe the coding process applied in formulating the findings as informed by the methods of thematic analysis and the constructivist grounded theory approach. This chapter also discusses the consideration given to ethical concerns in the research and issues of reflexivity and trustworthiness.

Chapters Five, Six and Seven constitute the third part of this thesis—the research findings. The thematic findings presented in Chapter Five illustrate how young queer people experience the workplace as a sexually exclusive space. This chapter focuses on the exclusionary practices encountered by participants in their work-relationships and the strategies through which they resisted and refuted these oppressive practices. Chapter Six demonstrates how young queer people experienced the workplace as a regulatory space and a silencing space. In my discussion of regulatory spaces, I identify how

participants adopt and adhere to self-regulatory practices to ensure that queer sexualities remain invisible in their work-relationships. In my examination of the workplace as a silencing space, I outline the three states of silence reflected in participants' accounts before elaborating on the methods through which young people disclosed queer sexualities in their work-relationships. Chapter Seven focuses on participants' descriptions of employment in inclusive spaces: work environments that support and validate the presence of queer sexualities in organisational life. This chapter incorporates participants' accounts of working in sexually diverse spaces in which they were not the only non-heterosexual employees. Within these diverse spaces, young queer employees did not always feel included or supported; these spaces operated as both exclusive and inclusive environments.

Chapters Eight and Nine, the fourth and final part of this study, provide the analytical discussion of this thesis. In Chapter Eight, I discuss the significance of the findings, namely how young queer people experience the workplace across multiple dimensions, and articulate how my research contributes to and extends the knowledge bases of sexuality, youth and the workplace. Chapter Nine concludes this thesis by outlining the implications of the research for organisational change and for social work knowledge and practice. This includes an appraisal of the limitations of the research and identifies areas for future research within the overlapping fields of youth studies, sexuality and the workplace.

Concluding comments to the chapter

This chapter has laid the foundations for this thesis and its exploration of how young people experience the workplace as queer workers. First, I have outlined the research problem and the background concerns that have informed its definition—the location of young workers in increasingly precarious employment and the problematic presence of queer sexualities in the workplace. Second, I have introduced the theoretical approach to this inquiry, informed by aspects of lesbian and gay studies, queer theory and

postmodern critical social work. Following this, I have defined the key concepts that inform the research question. Third, I have positioned this study as a further contribution to the growing body of social work literature on critical theory, sexuality and queer studies. Finally, I have presented the outline for this thesis across three parts.

In the next chapter, I review the literature relevant to this study and examine the theoretical discussions from both lesbian and gay studies and queer theory that have informed my inquiry.

CHAPTER TWO

The socio-cultural context of young queer people in the workplace

Introduction to the chapter

Workplaces are not divorced from their historical, social and cultural context. Sexual relations in the workplace are firmly embedded within this broader context, reflecting the ‘social organisation of sexuality’ (Burrell & Hearn 1989, p. 18). Therefore, it is fundamental to any investigation of sexuality in the workplace to consider the historical, social and cultural context of the construction of sexuality, and more specifically non-normative sexualities, in contemporary society (Creed 2006, p. 388). This is the first of two chapters reviewing the background literature that informs the research question of how young people experience the workplace as queer workers. In this chapter, I focus on the socio-cultural context of young queer people in the workplace and the broader institutional and structural arrangements that shape the individual experiences of young queers in Western societies. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the theoretical anchors that have informed this study from both lesbian and gay studies and queer theory. I divide these ideas across two theoretical discussions.

In the first discussion, I review how other authors have theorised the socio-cultural context of sexuality and social oppression in Western societies. This review is divided into three parts. First, I outline Michel Foucault’s (1977, 1978) conceptualisation of disciplinary power and the formation of sexuality as a normative knowledge base. This leads into examining how other writers have critically analysed heterosexuality as a normative social arrangement and the social and epistemological bases underpinning its dominance. Second, I focus more specifically on sexuality as a site of homosexual oppression, and I sift through the concepts developed to comprehend the manifestations and operations of homosexual oppression, such as homophobia, heterosexism and homonegativity. Third, I examine how other authors theorise homophobic violence as a site of visibility and subjectification. Within this part, I focus on the literature examining

how homophobic violence can function as a subjectifying process and the safety strategies queer people, including young queer people, adopt in negotiating hostile social settings.

While the first discussion attends to the contributions of other social and theoretical studies in a broad manner, the second discussion shifts focus to more closely examine how young queer people are represented in the social sciences and lesbian and gay studies. In particular, I examine the dominant narrative representations that have evolved from these fields. This involves critical discussion of the narrative structures that convey particular kinds of stories about what it means to be young and queer. Specifically, I focus on narratives of ‘coming out’ and narratives of struggle and survival. Finally, I review efforts to re-orientate the analysis of young queer people away from a problem-saturated narrative towards recognition of their agency.

Theorising sexuality and social oppression in Western societies

Sexuality is recognised as a widespread source of ‘social division and inequality’ in Western worlds (Scott & Jackson 2000, p. 168). Theoretical discussions aimed at comprehending the relationship between human sexuality and social inequality encompass numerous theoretical concepts and perspectives. These concepts and perspectives reflect the complexity of comprehending how social inequalities are sustained between differently positioned subjects within the discursive field of sexuality. Discursive fields consist of multiple discourses or ‘competing ways of giving meaning to the world and of organising social institutions and processes’ (Weedon 1987, p. 35). Accordingly, sexuality is not a unified construct but a contested field of cultural meanings, language and power relations centred on the erotic body. From a constructionist position, sexuality is constituted through the negotiation of power in human relationships:

...sexuality is something which society produces in complex ways. It is a result of diverse social practices that give meaning to human activities, of social definitions and self-definitions, of struggles between those who have power to define and regulate, and those who resist. Sexuality is not a given, it is a product of negotiation, struggle and human agency (Weeks 2003, p. 19).

Within this discussion, I examine the literature that provides the foundations for comprehending the operations and functions of sexuality and social oppression in Western societies. This discussion is divided into three parts. In the first part, I approach sexuality as a dominant knowledge-structure about the individual self and as a source of social organisation in Western societies. I introduce Michel Foucault's seminal discussion of sexuality as a normative knowledge base and outline critical and queer perspectives that have examined the dominance of heterosexual normalcy. The second part explores concepts aimed at comprehending the social oppression of homosexual subjectivities, through theoretical terms such as homophobia, heterosexism and homonegativity. In the third part, I examine other writers' perspectives of the ways in which homophobic violence can operate as a subjectifying process and the means by which queer individuals negotiate homophobic violence and hostility across social settings. This includes a specific focus on young queer people's experiences of homophobic violence and sexuality-based oppression.

Power, sexuality and the heterosexual centre

According to Michel Foucault (1978), sexuality is theorised as a framework of social and political regulation and institutional intervention in Western societies. In his seminal text *The History of Sexuality Volume 1*, Foucault (1978) discussed the science of sexuality (or *scientia sexualis*) as a body of expert knowledge that came into fruition in the nineteenth century through a series of institutionalised methods for mapping, charting and regulating human intimacies and desires. From this theoretical basis, queer and other critical authors have centered on the ways in which heterosexuality sustains its dominant social and sexual status. This status is sustained through its epistemological foundations

in the heterosexual/homosexual binary and through its establishment as a normative knowledge base. Foucault's wider discussion of knowledge, disciplinary power and subjectivity is fundamental to his analysis of the 'sexual subject' and its historical formation.

Disciplinary power, knowledge and subjectivity

Within his text *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault theorised power as a productive and relational force that operates through the individual disciplining of the body. Mills (2003) summarises Foucault's elaborate description of disciplinary power as a set of intricate techniques and procedures which, while exerted from outside the individual through cultural and institutional arrangements, sought to achieve the 'disciplining of the self by the self' (p. 43). As Chambon and Wang (1999) define: 'Disciplines invite individuals to willingly participate in the process of self-construction' (p. 271). Foucault (1977) defined power as a relational force exerted through a range of 'disciplines':

'Discipline' may be identified neither with an institution nor with an apparatus; it is a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets; it is a 'physics' or an 'anatomy' of power, a technology (p. 215).

Relational in this context refers to power being ever-present and always in flux and negotiation within human relationships. Power is neither a static force or solely possessed as 'power is everywhere' (Foucault 1978, p. 93). Foucault (1980b, p. 98) describes the discursive organisation of power as 'net-like'; it encapsulates all human subjects while individuals exercise power within its folds. Foucault (1980c) gives emphasis to the effects that are produced at the very moments when individuals exercise power within 'the field of application'. In this sense, power is productive; the exercise of power creates or produces particular subjectivities, classifications, and forms of knowledge (Foucault 1980c, p. 119). As a productive force, power is inextricably linked with knowledge and 'knowing' about the individual subject: '...it produces reality; it

produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production' (Foucault 1977, p. 194). The exercise of disciplinary power does not aim to make visible what already exists. Instead, it forms the constitutive basis of particular kinds of subjects by bringing them into visibility.

Within wider postmodern thought, the concept of 'subjectivity' is preferred over essentialist notions of identity. Subjectivity is the product of discourse (Healy 2005, p. 200). As we interpret and understand social reality through discourse, we also construct our sense of selves through discourse, 'our subjectivity' (Weedon 1987, p. 33). This is not a unified self but a contested sense of identity as our location in particular discursive fields shifts across contexts:

The individual is both the site for a range of possible forms of subjectivity and, at any particular moment of thought or speech, a subject, subjected to the regime of meaning of a particular discourse and enabled to act accordingly (Weedon 1987, p. 34).

Subject positions produce particular standpoints within discursive fields. These standpoints specify storylines from which individuals assuming these positions understand themselves and their relationships with others (Alvesson 2002, p. 50; Pease & Fook 1999, p. 15).

Within his discussion of disciplinary power, Foucault (1977) identified two fundamental processes to the application of power and the construction of knowledge about the individual subject: the panoptic gaze and the process of normalisation. Panopticism is the 'exemplary technique' of self-discipline in which visibility and knowledge are intrinsic dimensions (McHoul & Grace 1997, p. 67). The panoptic metaphor is founded on Jeremy Bentham's conceptual design of the 'Panopticon'. As an architectural feature, the 'Panopticon' is depicted as a central observational tower located within the centre of punitive institutions through which the observer can always observe each individually detained subject (Foucault 1977, p. 200). The central tower and surrounding cells are spatially organised so that the observed subject is always in light and therefore in view.

Power is exercised through visibility in which the captured subject is constantly aware of an ever-present gaze but never able to determine whether or when they are under observation (Foucault 1977, p. 201). The observed subject becomes the ‘bearer’ of their own self-discipline by which they must govern their own actions and internalise the ever-present gaze as ‘individuals come to monitor themselves’ (Chambon & Wang, 1999, p. 276). As Foucault (1977) elaborates:

He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection (p. 202).

Foucault (1977) discusses normalisation as one of the ‘great instruments’ of disciplinary power which examines social groups as homogenous populations while seeking to chart and regulate individual anomalies within social groupings. As Foucault (1977) explains: ‘...the power of normalisation imposes homogeneity; but it individualises by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialities and to render the differences useful by fitting them one to another’ (p. 184). Yep (2003, p. 18) further defines normalisation as a social and cultural process by which particular standards of living, behaviour and knowledge are defined as governing norms. Other value-positions, perspectives and knowledge-claims are evaluated through the imposition of social norms. These disciplinary processes contributed to the basis of what Foucault (1977) framed as a ‘disciplinary society’ (p. 209), referring to a wider system of modern governance. Within this system, disciplining techniques can be adapted to a range of settings for the purposes of ordering, coercing and deploying particular usages from individual subjects with the minimal application of force (Foucault 1977, p. 211).

Foucault’s discussion of disciplinary power and subjectivity has been criticised as conservative. Weeks (1989, p. 8) has argued that it is difficult to locate a sense of agency in Foucault’s work; the idea of discourse and power as constituting the basis of individual subjectivities leaves the reader feeling immobilised. This is a recurring

criticism of Foucault's work that centres on the concept of agency: the capacity for individuals to act independently of social and discursive forces (Chambon 1999, p. 70). However, Spargo (1999, p. 21) points out that such comments overlook the emphasis Foucault gives to power as a productive force, not just a source of repression or prohibition. Foucault (1980d, p. 142) has argued that at the various points in which power is exercised, moments of resistance are ever-present across all human relationships. There is no singular or cohesive point of resistance but multiple possibilities of resistance: 'We can never be ensnared by power: we can always modify its grip in determinate conditions and according to a precise strategy' (Foucault 1988, p. 123). Just as power can be enabling as well as constraining, it can also be exercised by individuals who are not powerless agents within set discursive fields (Mills 2003, p. 47). The productive basis of power is central to the modern formation of sexuality.

The formation of the sexual subject and the significance of identity categories

Through his genealogical examination of sexuality as an historical construction, Foucault (1991) proposed that sexuality symbolised a 'type of normativity' and a 'domain of knowledge' (p. 333). This knowledge-domain has informed theories of sexual behaviour, rules of moral conduct, and frameworks for forming explanatory schemas of the erotic self. The 'homosexual' as an aberrant individual arose in the eighteenth century from what Foucault (1978, p. 105) discussed as the 'psychiatrization of power and pleasure', involving the medical classification of non-normative sexual desires and activities. Before this time, the 'homosexual' did not exist: '[it] was now a species (Foucault 1978, p. 43).

A range of culturally circulated identity statements has evolved from this body of knowledge, which individuals deploy to describe and make sense of their own sexual subjectivity (Pini 1997, p. 159). Ideas of autonomous selfhood are described by Foucault (1977) as 'fictitious atom[s]' (p. 194). In this sense, the individual 'self' is an effect of identity statements, such as 'I am gay'. These statements constitute a 'technology of the self' in which individuals embody cultural and social norms that inform the construction of life-narratives (Pini 1997, p. 159). From a Foucauldian perspective, such statements not only constitute the basis of individual biography but also symbolise the disciplining

of the self as a 'homosexual' subject. This is in accordance with culturally intelligible signifiers such as 'gay' and 'lesbian' behaviours, interests and sub-cultures.

As a 'queer' author, Judith Butler (1990, 1991, 1993) has built on Foucault's discussion of sexuality to 'trouble' the stability of identity categories that flow from dominant ideas about gender and sexuality. Butler (1990, 1993) has questioned pre-ordained categories such as man/woman and heterosexuality/homosexuality, and re-interpreted sexuality and gender as reiterative, performative-based identities. The recognition of sexuality and gender as performative destabilises any notion of a fixed identity that exists prior to discourse (Butler 1990, p. 185). According to Butler (1993, p. 225), the practice of naming is central to the formation of sexual subjectivities—a practice by which the authoritative voice of the speaker positions themselves as a particular kind of sexual or gendered subject. Sexuality as a social identity does not precede the speaker but rather is attributed meaning through speech-acts. While the embodiment of sexual and gender norms and identities is a compulsory social practice, it is never fully determining as individual subjects do not neatly fit their gendered positions of 'man' and 'woman' or 'straight' and 'gay' (Butler 1993, p. 232).

Butler (1991, p. 13) interprets sexual identity categories as 'instruments of regulatory regimes' that produce cultural templates on how the sexual self should be and act in the social world. In this sense, identity categories can function as totalising templates that deny individual differences across other social systems of power. Similarly, the operations of collective sexual communities can have exclusionary functions (Butler 1993, p. 227). An historical example is the exclusion of people who identify as bisexual from mainstream gay and lesbian politics 'as they do not fit neatly into the hetero/homosexual divide' (McPhail 2004, p. 11). Emanating from Foucault and Butler's seminal arguments, queer theorists have expressed wariness of sexual and gender identities as master categories that constrain the expression of individual life-experiences (Yep 2003). Inevitably, sexual identity categories fail to contain the troubling and contradictory desires, attractions, fantasies and cultural narratives which produce sexual subject positions; as Yep evocatively describes (2003, p. 39) '[identity] categories leak, ooze and bleed'. Despite her concerns, Butler (1993, p. 229) concedes that collective identities such as 'women', 'gay' and 'lesbian' may be necessary "errors" in forming political communities for refuting sexual and gendered inequalities.

From a different disciplinary angle, sociological authors have argued that identity categories can be critical sites for producing social collectives and generating political agency, as evident in the 1970's gay liberationist movement (Burkitt 1998; Kirsch 2006; Seidman 1993). On an individual level, sexual identities function as meaningful narratives. Weeks (2003b, p. 123) argues that narratives of identity bring a sense of coherence, stability and agency to individual lives, and enable us to express values and morals, which we share with others collectively and separates us from others. While identity categories may be fictitious, they can be reconceived, as Weeks (2003b, p. 129) describes, as 'necessary fictions' in providing a personal sense of belonging and recognition. Social identities, including sexual identities, shape everyday human interactions, as they constitute the 'ways we think of ourselves and the self image we publicly project' (Seidman 2004, p. 9).

Building on Foucault's discussions of sexuality as normative knowledge base, queer theorists have examined how the heterosexual/homosexual binary operates as a central fixture in Western modern thought. These writers have sought to trouble the social divisions sustained through its pre-eminence.

The epistemological functions of the heterosexual/homosexual binary

Queer theorists have argued that the dominant binary of heterosexual/homosexual constitutes a fundamental knowledge base for understanding sexuality in the twentieth century (Sedgwick 1990, p. 1). From her influential text *The Epistemology of the Closet*, literary theorist Eve K. Sedgwick (1990) states that 'an understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition' (p. 1). Sedgwick (1990, p. 11) proposes that the heterosexual/homosexual binary has provided the epistemological foundations for corresponding binary logic, evident in linguistic pairings such as in/out, public/private and secrecy/disclosure. These binary concepts have heavily shaped Western understandings of contemporary social and political life. Within the heterosexual/homosexual binary, the former term is privileged over the latter, constructing a hierarchical order of sexuality.

The production of knowledge through binary-structures stems from the prevalence of logocentric thought in Western societies. Logocentrism is the belief of a singular and logical order of knowledge through which logic-based paradigms, such as positivism, are given greater authority over other approaches to knowing about the social world (Derrida cited in Sands & Nuccio 1992, p. 491). As originally discussed by Derrida (1976), supplementarity refers to the linguistic process by which meanings are inscribed in opposition to each other through binary logic. The heterosexual/homosexual binary is an inherently unstable relationship in which the two terms seek to remain separate while dependent on each other for mutual definition (Fuss 1991, p. 3; Namaste 1996, p. 198). According to Sedgwick (1990, p. 10), this relationship of mutual dependence and linguistic opposition represents a 'double bind' in which the fragility of heterosexuality as a normative stance cannot exist without homosexuality to give it meaning. At the same time, heterosexuality remains continually undermined by the existence of homosexual desires that challenge its normalised status.

Emergent from the cultural logic of the heterosexual/homosexual binary is the metaphor of the closet. In modern Western cultures, the closet metaphor has symbolised a space of shelter and protection from homosexual oppression; it represents what Sedgwick (1990, p. 71) describes as the 'defining structure for gay oppression' in the twentieth century. Sedgwick (1990, p. 68) identifies the closet as a 'fundamental feature of social life' for many non-heterosexual people. Following on from Butler (1991) and Sedgwick (1990), Mason (2002, p. 82) contends that lesbian and gay lives rarely live either in or out of the closet but rather negotiate its metaphorical borders daily. In this sense, the closet can be experienced as an unstable and unreliable space for sustaining invisibility as queer subjects. It is also an inescapable space as each new encounter with an unfamiliar person brings with it the potential presumption of heterosexuality, as discussed by Sedgwick (1990): '...the deadly elasticity of heterosexist presumption means that, like Wendy in *Peter Pan*, people find new walls springing up around them even as they drowse' (p. 68).

In the context of contemporary North American society, Seidman et al (Seidman, Meeks & Traschen 2002; Seidman 2004) propose that many queer individuals are now living 'beyond the closet'. These authors provide a social account of the closet, based on their research interviews with lesbian women and gay men in North America. Seidman et al (2002) propose that the homosexual significance of the closet has dwindled as lesbian

and gay identities have entered everyday discourse and become routinely normalised into regular patterns of social life. While recognising the institutionalisation of heterosexual dominance within US society, Seidman et al (2002, 2004) argue that queer social lives are no longer configured around the defining division between straight and gay worlds.

Critical discussions of the heterosexual/homosexual binary, its epistemological roots and the central motif of the closet have coincided with increasing 'queer' interest in the privileged centre of sexuality, heterosexuality.

Examining heterosexuality: Shifting from the margins to the centre

Within the field of lesbian and gay studies, heterosexuality as a field of analysis has until recently evaded academic consideration. Attention has been diverted to specialised social groups as 'deviant' and marginalised sexual communities, including lesbian and gay communities (Gamson 2003; Kitzinger, Wilkinson & Perkins 1992; Richardson 1996). In contrast, queer theorists have shifted attention away from homosexuality as an objectified field of analysis and called for an interrogation of heterosexuality as a 'universal' discourse (Halperin 1995, p. 57). David Halperin (1995, p. 57) claims that heterosexuality maintains its unspoken existence through its absence within cultural, social and scientific inquiry.

Heterosexuality is best understood as both a cultural arrangement and a social institution whose norms and rules are explicated across the majority of individual lives throughout the human lifespan (Ingraham 2002, p. 74). Like homosexuality, it is not approached as a biological entity but rather as a source of social cohesion that is always provisional and far from consistent (Berlant & Warner 1998; Butler 1991). Butler (1990) has extensively questioned the naturalised appearance of heterosexuality by troubling the assumed linkages between sex, gender and desire and outlining the operations of the 'heterosexual matrix' (p. 208). This matrix refers to a dominant ordering of bodies that rests on the notion of fixed and stable sexes and oppositional gender roles. This ordering maintains the naturalised appearance, stability and coherence of heterosexuality as a privileged social arrangement (Butler 1990, p. 208, 1993, p. 239).

Heterosexuality as a social structure has received extensive critique from feminist and lesbian-feminist standpoints (Richardson 1996). Second wave and post-structural feminist theorists have emphasised the inextricability of sexuality and gender as interrelated concepts that mutually maintain inequitable gendered relations and regulatory gender norms (Pringle 1992). From a social constructionist stance, Jackson (2005) defines gender as a 'hierarchical social division between women and men embedded in both social institutions and social practices' (p. 16). Prior to queer theory, Adrienne Rich's (1980) essay on 'compulsory heterosexuality' situated heterosexuality as an oppressive institution operating through women being made dependent on and sexually available to men. According to Rich (1980), feminism needs to account for heterosexuality as a political source of the oppression of all women. The fusion between heterosexual dominance and male privilege has been further recognised in concepts such as 'heterogender' (Ingraham 1996) and 'heteropatriarchy' (Valentine 1993; Yep 2003).

Heterosexuality retains its privileged status through the sustainment of sexual hierarchies. The historical construction of sexual categories such as 'gay', 'lesbian' and 'bisexual' identities are politically necessary in maintaining the social organisation of sexuality within a hierarchy of socio-erotic categories (Ingraham 2005; Seidman 1995; Weeks 2003b). At the top of this hierarchy, heterosexuality is privileged as a 'primary category' for organising social life and for generating the consciousness of 'thinking straight' (Ingraham 2005, p. 2). To demonstrate a hierarchy of sex values operating in Western societies, Gayle Rubin (1984, p. 129) depicted an 'erotic pyramid' that differentiates between 'good' and 'bad' sexual acts. Sexual behaviours located at the pinnacle of the pyramid are institutionally sanctified; these behaviours benefit from social and economic rewards. This is evident in the privileging of heterosexual, monogamous and married relationships. In contrast, punitive measures are frequently applied to sexual acts located at the lower end of the pyramid; acts that are deemed morally disreputable, such as sex work (Rubin 1984, p. 279).

Heterosexual dominance is sustained through the enmeshment of heterosexuality in everyday life; this is encapsulated in the concept of heteronormativity. Queer theorists identify heteronormativity as the cultural saturation of heterosexual norms and values in contemporary social and political life (Berlant & Warner 1998; Warner 1993). Heteronormativity is a ubiquitous body of knowledge that has bled into all aspects of

social and cultural life. Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner (1998) describe heteronormativity as ‘...the institutions, structures of understanding and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent—that is organised as a sexuality—but also privileged’ (p. 548). An inherent and universal assumption contained within heteronormative logic is the equation of heterosexual experience with human experience: ‘heterosexual experience is *synonymous with* human experience’ (Yep 2002, p. 167, emphasis in original text). Its meaning extends beyond the defined boundaries of sexuality. Heteronormative logic is embedded within systems of political state and citizenship, including systems of taxation, welfare and social security (Johnson 2002, 2003; McCreery 1999; Richardson 1996).

The concept of heteronormativity rests on Foucault’s (1977) theorisation of normalisation, as previously discussed. Heterosexuality assumes an authoritative and sanctified position of normalcy in relation to which other sexual subjectivities are compared and evaluated. Warner (2000, p. 60) explains that the rhetoric of normalisation relies on local knowledge sources, such as ‘common sense’, and people in higher authorities, such as political leaders, for re-enforcing what constitutes ‘the normal’. Heteronormative discourses on sex and sexuality are also ratified through the political practice of shaming. Sexual shaming can be a powerful act when wielded by people in authoritative positions; its intention is to exercise control over ‘deviant’ sexual expressions as ‘shame makes some pleasures tacitly inadmissible, unthinkable’ in the wider public arena (Warner 2000, p. 3). Further, shame can stick like mud as a vilified social status (Warner 2002, p. 17).

In the second part of this discussion, I shift focus from the critique of heterosexual dominance and heteronormative arrangements to the theoretical concepts used to name and define the social oppression of individuals situated outside the normative confines of heterosexuality—the homosexual other.

Naming and defining homosexual oppression

In this second part, I explore the concepts developed in the lesbian and gay studies literature to comprehend homosexual oppression in Western societies. As David Plummer (1999) argues: ‘In the modern Western world, anti-homosexual bias seems to be resilient and persistent and it permeates the “social fabric”’ (p. 32). Over the last thirty-five years, an array of theoretical concepts has emerged from the social and behavioural sciences to describe and comprehend the injurious ways in which ‘anti-homosexual biases’ impinge on the lives of non-heterosexual people. This includes the concepts homophobia, heterosexism and homonegativity.

Homophobia

The term ‘homophobia’ is widely dispersed across English languages and consequentially its meaning and application is often ambiguous and diffuse (Green 2005; Herek 2004). Generally, homophobia denotes expressions of disapproval and animosity towards homosexuality, same-sex relationships and same-sex desires (Tomsen & Mason 1997, p. vii). Psychotherapist George Weinberg’s original definition of homophobia as a clinical psychological state focused on ‘the dread of being in close quarters with homosexuals’ (1972 cited in Plummer 1999, p. 4). Through the conception of homophobia, a new person of ‘psychological aberration’ was created: the homophobe (Green 2000, p. 57).

As a clinically defined disorder, the term homophobia has several shortfalls. First, the term itself is at odds with what is clinically recognised as a ‘phobia’ (Green 2005; Plummer 1999; Tomsen 2002; Wickberg 2000). Whereas phobias are associated with extreme anxiety in which sufferers seek to overcome their debilitating fears, homophobia is typically expressed through hostility and anger in which perpetrators rarely demonstrate remorse for their intended actions (Plummer 1999, p. 4). Second, treating homophobia as a clinical disorder interprets homophobic behaviour as an irrational response. This excuses the perpetrator from individual responsibility and normalises their hostile responses as symptoms rather than intentional actions (Fish 2006, p. 5;

George 1997, p. 54). While phobias are located in the individual psyche, expressions of negativity towards non-normative sexualities have cultural and political bases (Plummer 1999, p. 4). Third, clinical definitions of homophobia do not recognise the institutional and structural dimensions, which sustain oppressive belief systems and violence (Fish 2006, p. 8; Ruthchild 1997; Wickberg 2000).

In response to these criticisms, Herek (2000; 2004) has recently proposed the concept of 'sexual prejudice'. 'Sexual prejudice' is defined as 'negative attitudes towards homosexual behaviour; people who engage in homosexual behaviour or who identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual; and communities of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people' (Herek 2004, p. 17). However, on its own 'sexual prejudice' does not give adequate attention to the cultural, institutional and political context of homophobia or the gendered basis of homophobic expressions. As a 'prejudice', it remains inscribed as a psychological disposition located in the mind of the beholder.

Contemporary definitions of homophobia describe it as a set of cultural practices and beliefs exhibiting intolerance towards non-heterosexual expressions and same-sex acts (Green 2005). Homophobic beliefs locate homosexuality as the sexual 'other' (Plummer 1999, p. 36). Green (2005) and Plummer (1999) specify a series of 'othering' themes that inform homophobic beliefs. These themes locate homosexual bodies and same-sex acts:

(1) As sites of pollution, disease and contagion (Green 2005, p. 123; Plummer 1999, p. 25);

(2) As sinful, and therefore immoral, behaviour that contravenes Judeo-Christian doctrine (Green 2005, p. 124);

(3) As against nature and biological imperatives of reproduction (Green 2005, p. 127; Plummer 1999, p. 27); and

(4) As an 'antisocial' force (Plummer 1999, p. 29), which threatens the 'social and moral responsibilities of citizens in a nation state' (Green 2005, p. 128). In this theme, heterosexual normalcy is linked to concepts of geopolitical citizenship and nation-status.

Homophobia is also discussed as a gendered social phenomenon. Through a gendered framework, homophobic violence is a means of reinforcing 'strict gender codes' (Barron & Bradford 2007, p. 241), and policing masculine performances in the hands of boys through to older men (Plummer 1999, 2001; Tomsen 2002; Tomsen & Mason 2004). Building on Connell's sociological notion of hegemonic masculinities, Connell, Davis and Dowsett (2000) argue that homophobia is an instrument of hegemony in contemporary gender relations: 'Hegemonic masculinity is emphatically heterosexual, homosexual masculinities are subordinated. This subordination not only involves the oppression of homosexual boys and men, sometimes by violence, it also involves the informal policing of heterosexual boys and men' (p. 102). In the more gratuitous form of 'gay bashing', violence can be a means of reinforcing group identities of heterosexuality and hegemonic masculinity among young male offenders (Tomsen & Mason 2001, p. 267).

In relation to homophobic abuse against women, Mason (1997, p. 23) argues that motivations behind anti-lesbian violence cannot be separated from either gender or sexuality; 'femaleness' and 'homosexuality' converge in the one body. Anti-lesbian violence is a means of enforcing heterosexual relations, 'feminizing' the victim and punishing women's bodies as polluted sites that require moral cleansing (Mason & Tomsen 2001; Mason 2002).

Heterosexism

From the mid-1970s onwards, behavioural scientists began to speak of 'heterosexism' as an ideological system that informed homophobic expressions (Morin & Garfinkle 1978). Like homophobia, the term heterosexism is as equally diffuse and ambiguous in definition. Heterosexism was first defined as a system of ideology that privileged heterosexuality as the prevailing standard of social and intimate relations (Morin & Garfinkle 1978). Herek (1990) has defined heterosexism as 'an ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any non-heterosexual form of behaviour, identity, relationship, or community' (p. 316). Cultural heterosexism denotes shared systems of 'belief, values and customs' that inform individual worldviews while psychological heterosexism is the 'individual manifestation of anti-gay prejudice' (Herek 1990, p. 323).

According to Brickell (2005), cultural heterosexism has undergone a transformation in the way it is expressed in contemporary society; heterosexism represents a newer form of 'libertarian' discourse in Western democracies. Libertarianism refers to the 'notion of the individual who is detached from all social structure, self-directed, autonomous, and a possessor of a "negative" freedom—the freedom of action without restraint' (Brickell 2005, p. 89). On this basis, heterosexism is expressed through publicised fears that heterosexuality faces continual attack from civil rights and 'special rights' groups, such as lesbian and gay interest groups. Within this discursive logic, the homosexual other is reinterpreted as the heterosexual oppressor (Brickell 2005, p. 86).

Heterosexist assumptions are routinely conveyed through silence: the unspokenness surrounding heterosexual privilege (Epstein & Johnson 1994, p. 225; Fish 2006, p. 19). Epstein and Johnson (1994) discuss cultural heterosexism as the social context in which the ubiquitous presumption of heterosexuality is 'encoded in language, in institutional practices and the encounters of everyday life' beyond the point of recognition (p. 198). Institutional heterosexism involves the production and enforcement of heterosexist beliefs through institutional practices (Epstein & Johnson 1994, p. 211). For example, institutional heterosexism is evident through the conspicuous absence of lesbian and gay-related subject matter in school curriculums (Epstein & Johnson 1994).

Internalised homophobia and homonegativity

The concept of 'internalised homophobia' (IH) has generated extensive interest in psychology, psychotherapy and lesbian and gay studies (Russell & Bohan 2006), and in social work literature (see, for example, Brown 1998; Morrow 2004). Internalised homophobia is defined as a cognitive process entailing the self-appropriation of homophobic beliefs and the internalisation of negative messages about the sexual self by queer individuals (Brown 1998; Morrow 2004; Spencer & Brown 2007). Its individual 'markings' are evident in psychological states of depression, resignation and apathy, what Kirsch (2006) refers to as 'reactions to the ways in which we view ourselves, which in turn are, at least in part, due to the ways in which we are constantly told to view ourselves' (p. 38).

Several criticisms of this term have been expressed. To live in a culture in which homophobia is widespread presupposes that all queer individuals must at some point in their life span 'internalise' homophobic belief systems; if the prevalence of IH is universal, this partly undermines its validity as a psychological disposition (Plummer 1999, p. 206). The term IH implies that the psychological health of the queer individual is the recognised problem, rather than the wider hetero-centric environment in which the individual is situated (Fish 2006, p. 5). Russell and Bohan (2006) argue that IH represents another pathological discourse for recasting queer identities under the classification of mental illness. In doing so, it perpetuates a false boundary between the internal psychic state and the exterior social environment. Instead, Russell & Bohan (2006) emphasise the context of living in a 'homonegative' culture.

According to Russell and Bohan (2006), we are all embedded in what they discuss as 'homonegativity'. Homonegativity is a collective perspective, constitutive of social reality that is discursively produced through processes of social exchange. As a linguistic formation, homonegativity represents a way of knowing about the world and is more than an individually prejudiced rejection of what is despised or resented (Russell & Bohan 2006, p. 350). All social actors, regardless of sexuality, both 'receive' and 'transmit' the collective meanings of homonegativity (Russell & Bohan 2006): '...homonegativity is simply everywhere, like oxygen—in the air and in each/all of us, without differentiation and with its existence indistinguishable from its continuing flow across (linguistic) boundaries between self and social that are revealed as thoroughly permeable' (p. 349). Despite its ubiquity, the impact of homonegativity is differentially experienced depending on social positioning (Russell & Bohan 2006, p. 352). Russell and Bohan (2006) liken the 'absorption' and 'reiteration' of homonegative beliefs by queer individuals to a collective process of 'social ventriloquation' in which we '...regularly ventriloquate cultural assumptions in our language and actions' (p. 350).

The third part of this discussion moves from the conceptualisation of 'anti-homosexual biases' to elaborating on its material and discursive effects in Western societies, namely the production of homophobic violence.

Negotiating homophobic violence and its subjectifying effects

In the third part of this discussion, I focus on the literature examining the daily negotiation of homophobic violence by non-heterosexual people. I discuss Gail Mason's (2002) theorising of homophobic violence as a process of subjectification, as well as acknowledging other contributors from lesbian and gay studies. This includes a particular focus on studies examining young queer people's experiences of violence. I conclude by reviewing the strategies of concealment, self-censorship and self-regulation imposed by non-heterosexual people on their everyday movements across social and public spaces in response to the pervasive threat of homophobic violence.

Homophobic violence, visibility and subjectification

The expression of homophobic violence is a material reality in Australian communities. Recent social surveys illustrate the prevalence of homophobic expressions and discriminatory actions against queer people living in rural and urban Australia (Attorney General's Department of NSW 2003; Pitts, Smith, Mitchell & Patel 2006) and the prevalence of homophobic attitudes across all Australian states and territories (Flood & Hamilton 2005). Homophobic violence is also an everyday reality for many young queer people in Australia. The second national survey of 'same-sex attracted young people', *Writing Themselves in Again*, indicates that 44% of 1,749 respondents (aged 14–21) reported experiences of verbal abuse, including name-calling and insults. Fifteen percent (15%) of young respondents reported physical abuse based on their sexuality (Hillier, Turner & Mitchell 2005, p. 37). Secondary schools were noted as the most dangerous place for homophobic abuse and bullying to occur (Hillier et al 2005, p. 39).

Within institutional settings such as secondary schools, homophobic violence can be routinely experienced as a discursive, normalising force (Barron & Bradford 2007; Miceli 2002). Barron & Bradford (2007) have theorised the oppressive treatment of young gay men through Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) sociological lens of symbolic violence. Bourdieu (1977, p. 191) defines symbolic violence as a socially sanctioned and therefore unrecognisable expression of violence exercised through language, social exchange and

the imposition of meaning. According to Bourdieu (1977, p. 183), language exchange forms the basis of social relationships within a series of economic practices geared towards the accumulation of material, cultural and symbolic capital. Symbolic violence is an insidious method of domination through its belying of conscious recognition as a form of violence. The invisibility of symbolic violence cloaks it from identification while quietly re-affirming hegemonic social relations: ‘...symbolic violence, the gentle, invisible form of violence, which is never recognised as such... cannot fail to be seen as the most economical mode of domination’ (Bourdieu 1977, p. 192).

Barron and Bradford (2007) liken symbolic violence against young gay bodies as a taken-for-granted expression of violence that is sanctioned within institutional settings, such as schools. Its intended effect is to ‘designate [normative] boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate sexualities, signalling the body’s value and status’ (Barron & Bradford 2007, p. 244). These authors point to ‘ritualised’ homophobic violence, such as name calling and bullying, as means of ‘identity policing’ amongst young men (Barron and Bradford 2007, p. 245). In a similar vein, Miceli (2002, p. 206) has discussed the transmission of symbolic violence through educational institutions and curriculums in which heterosexual interests are disproportionally represented. This is in comparison to the marginalised interests of non-heterosexual students.

Homophobic abuse and beliefs can affect young queer people’s health and wellbeing in numerous detrimental ways. Coping with homophobic abuse and hostility can generate acute psychosocial stressors for young queer people (D’Augelli, Pilkington & Hershberger 2002; Huebner, Rebhook & Kegeles 2004; Poteat 2007). It can also heighten young people’s engagement in risky, health-impeding activities. From their second national survey, Hillier et al (2005) indicate that young, queer respondents who had experienced abuse ‘were more likely to self-harm, report a sexually transmissible infection (STI) and use a range of legal and illegal drugs’ (p. 43) in comparison to respondents who had not reported violent experiences.

Homophobia can also have subjectifying effects for young queer people: everyday encounters with homophobic abuse and beliefs can reinforce oppressive messages about their sexuality as ‘unnatural, unhealthy, evil or freakish’ (Hillier et al 2005, p. 39). Based on qualitative data compiled from their first national survey, Hillier and Harrison (2004)

identified a series of homophobic discourses woven throughout young queer people's stories of their sexual selves. Such discourses included references to ill health and psychological disease, religious arguments of homosexuality as depraved and immoral, and taken-for-granted assumptions that heterosexuality is the natural and ultimate state of sexual being (Hillier & Harrison 2004). These dominant belief systems provide a restricted and demoralising cultural repertoire from which young people can script their own sexual narratives.

According to Gail Mason (2002), homophobic violence constitutes a subjectifying process for knowing about certain sexual subjects. Based on her interviews with lesbian-identifying women about their experiences of homophobic violence, Mason (2002) has argued that the perpetration of violence against women's bodies produces a limited number of subject positions. Within these subject positions, lesbian women are perceived as dangerous, threatening or hostile to predominantly male perpetrators. The expression of homophobic violence carries cultural messages that say something about the targeted body: '... the violence of homophobia represents a body of knowledge that contributes to the recognition of "what" homosexuality is' (Mason 2002, p. 109). On this basis, violence makes statements about its intended victim that can inform the victim's sexual biography and understandings of the sexual self. Mason (2002, p. 117) is quick to point out that this process of subjectification is never fully determining of the victim's sense of identity.

Foucault's (1977) discussion of the panoptic gaze and the subjectifying power of visibility, as discussed earlier, are foundational to Mason's theorising of homophobic violence as a process of knowledge production. Mason (2002) argues that 'vision has long been a metaphor for knowledge' (p. 83). To see certain subjects is to know about the subject. Visuality is a key dimension of knowledge production through which certain kinds of sexual subjects, including the homosexual, are produced (Mason 2002). Processes of 'subjectification' involve the 'production, and performance, of identity through categories and groupings that tell us that we are certain types of individuals' (Mason 2002, p. 107). The visible proclamation and performance of queer sexual subjectivities carries the ever-present potential threat of homophobic violence and discrimination, what Mason (2002, p. 81) refers to as 'social or legal sanctions'.

Safety mapping and other strategies of concealment

In negotiating the pervasive threat of homophobic violence and ensuring their personal safety, lesbian women and gay men construct what Mason (2001, 2002) describes as 'safety maps'. 'Safety maps' were originally discussed by von Schulthess (1992, p. 71) in her social study of lesbian women's experiences of violence in San Francisco. This process of mapping involves the perpetual monitoring of one's movements and immediate surroundings in response to the potential threat of violence. Mason (2002, p. 84) further argues that there are three key considerations to this mapping process: *personal*, *spatial* and *temporal*. Personal considerations include previous experiences of homophobic abuse or knowledge of others' experiences of violence as well as other social factors such as age, gender and race, which may determine levels of confidence within certain spatial contexts. Spatial considerations involve assessing the presence of individuals and social groups in particular spaces, for example the presence of a group of young white men in an empty mall at night-time. Temporal considerations include the time of day and how long it may take to travel from one destination to another.

Homophobic violence does not have to be directly experienced for individuals to adhere to processes of safety mapping; it is the individual's awareness of violence as an ever-present possibility that generates safety mapping (Mason 2002, p. 84). Through her interviews with lesbian women, Mason (2002) drew attention to the 'daily, localised practices' women deployed to monitor and, in certain situations, minimise visible signifiers of homosexuality under the potential gaze of others. A typical example is the decision-making about holding hands with same-sex partners in public spaces. As Mason's (2002) participants articulated 'it depends' (p. 89), it depends on continually assessing the risks and the rewards of engaging in what is seemingly a simple act of affection. Similarly, Myslik (1996, p. 165) discusses the 'editing of behaviour' by gay men in public spaces, such as avoiding physical displays of affection. Critical to these methods of safety mapping is the meticulous process of continually monitoring and modifying one's own body for visible signifiers that other people may correlate with homosexual subjectivities. The body is central to the negotiation of safety as individuals map their bodily practices in what Mason (2002) refers to as 'body maps': '...a cartographic matrix of practices for surveying, screening and supervising the times, places and ways in which one is manifest as homosexual' (p. 87).

Individual strategies for concealing, monitoring and regulating the visibility of non-normative sexual subjectivities have been discussed by other authors across related contexts. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, Goffman (1963) has discussed the management of stigmatised identities and discreditable information, inclusive of homosexual identities. In their analysis of how lesbians and gays protect themselves from homophobic violence, Stanko and Curry (1997) identify a dominant theme of playing the 'responsible queer' when traversing public spaces. Valentine (199a) has described the time-space strategies exercised by lesbian women in their negotiations across social environments. Mason's (2002) framework differs from these other discussions in that it explicitly links the process of safety and body mapping to Foucault's (1977) discussion of panopticism and the significant relationship between power, visibility and sexuality.

From early adolescence, many young queer people learn to conceal their sexuality as an acquired response to the pervasiveness of heterosexual presumption and the potential threat of homophobic hostility (Britzman 1997; Emslie 1999; Epstein & Johnson 1994; Telford 2003). From the *Writing Themselves in Again* survey (Hillier et al 2005), 40% of respondents reported constant vigilance of their immediate surroundings and their own actions under the potential threat of homophobic violence. This included 'self-censoring' displays of affection in public spaces and choosing to spend time alone (Hillier et al 2005, p. 50). Concealing queer sexualities from specific audiences, routinely monitoring one's actions and speech, and posing as heterosexual can be a laborious, stressful and isolating practice for young people. Consequently, practices of concealment can weaken young queer people's sense of self-worth and impair their capacity to build social support networks (Emslie 1999, p. 163; Hillier et al 2005, p. 51).

Summary

Within this discussion, I have examined how sexuality and social oppression in Western societies is discussed and conceptualised in the literature. First, from a Foucauldian standpoint, sexuality is discussed as a normative knowledge-structure, which has social, political and institutional implications for the organisation of social life and the social

privileging of heterosexuality. This has generated extensive interest in deconstructing the epistemological foundations of the heterosexual/homosexual binary and questioning the assumed normalcy of heterosexuality. Second, sexuality is discussed in the context of naming and comprehending the social oppression of non-normative sexual subjects. This has generated such concepts as homophobia, heterosexism and homonegativity. Third, sexuality and social oppression is considered in regards to the lived experience and subjectifying effects of homophobic violence. Within this body of literature, authors such as Gail Mason have shed light on the ways in which non-heterosexual people construct 'safety maps' and navigate their way through the ever-present threat of homophobic violence and hostility; this is illustrated in the reported experiences of both young and older queers.

The narrative representation of young queer lives

Over the last twenty years, the lives of young queer people have been represented in contested and limited ways within the health and social sciences and in lesbian and gay studies. This has contributed to a series of knowledge-narratives about the health, life-course development and identities of young queer people. Talburt (2004b) has argued that dominant narratives about the lives of young queer people portray limited pictures of their everyday lives: '...dominant narratives about queer youth make youth intelligible—to others and to themselves in narrowly defined ways. These narratives constitute a production of subject positions in which adults administer a group with problems and needs' (p. 18). The purpose of this second theoretical discussion is to bring attention to not only *what* we know about the lives of young queer people, but also *how* they are positioned, and how they position themselves, within particular cultural narratives about sexuality. I have organised this discussion into three narrative-streams prominent in the literature: narratives of 'coming out', narratives of struggle and survival, and narratives of agency.

In this discussion, I approach narratives as culturally circulated storylines that shape everyday understanding of social realities (Fook 2002, p. 133). Individual narratives are stories about the self and identity, infused with broader discourses and taken-for-granted beliefs, while cultural narratives are stories that contain both individual meaning and wider cultural significance within collectively shared storylines (Fook 2002, p. 132). I specifically focus on ‘narratives’ as Fook (2002) identifies the construction of narrative as an integral aspect of a critical postmodern approach to social work: ‘Using the term “narrative” implies a recognition of the ways in which we make and use knowledge to create and preserve our social worlds and our places within them’ (p. 132). Focusing on narrative construction informs our understanding about processes of knowledge-generation in social work and about the ways in which client groups are positioned and represented within particular fields of knowledge.

Narratives of ‘coming out’

The ‘coming out’ story is a collectively authored narrative as well as an individual storyline of ‘being’ a gay subject. ‘Coming out’ generally refers to a process of self-realisation in ‘accepting, revealing and affirming one’s identity as a gay man or lesbian’ and sharing this sense of self-realisation with others (Grierson & Smith 2005, p. 54). As a culturally circulated narrative, it is a storyline of self-discovery and identity construction, which marks the point of self-realisation and affirmation as a ‘gay’ subject:

The primary task of the gay adolescent in this narrative, is to overcome the inherent struggles of a spoiled identity, to transcend the inevitable internalization of heterosexism and homophobia, and to reclaim gay identity as a positive index of relational and sexual being (Cohler & Hammack 2007, p. 52).

Sociologist Ken Plummer (1995, p. 131) argues that the ‘coming out’ story is part of a broader culture of sexual storytelling and speaking about the ‘sexual self’ in modern

society. Conventionally, this narrative follows a chronological, coherent and linear pattern of storytelling about the declaration of a lesbian or gay identity to oneself and others (Plummer 1995, p. 52). The 'coming out' narrative is grounded in a historical and political context. The process of revealing one's true sexual self originated from the gay liberation movement during the 1970s as both a personal and a political statement. The visibility of gay and homosexual identities was central to the identity-based politics of this social movement (Grierson & Smith 2005; Hartmann 1993). It can be argued that 'coming out' is a distinct social practice for homosexual lives; it is not necessary or required for heterosexuals to combat the presumption of compulsory heterosexuality (Davies 1992). In this sense, it is symbolic of a continual never-ending struggle of 'coming out' to others. This can be a highly stressful and exhausting process of repeatedly dispelling the presumption of heterosexuality (Brown 1998, p. 49), as previously discussed.

Queer theorists have questioned the coherency and logic of the 'coming out' narrative. 'Coming out' is synonymously associated with the closet metaphor in modern Western cultures. To sustain 'outness' as an identity status always requires the continual presence of the closet; it only has meaning within the confinements of the in/out binary logic (Butler 1991, p. 16). Butler (1991, p. 16) has queried the underlying logic of the 'coming out' binary: '[out] into what?' Paradoxically, 'coming out' for lesbians and gays often parallels entry 'in' to sexual sub-cultures and communities. 'Coming out' of the closet can be an impossibly paradoxical process to manage in which queer sexualities, whether declared or closeted, are never completely free of the contradictory logic of homophobia (Halperin 1995; Sedgwick 1990). As Halperin (1995) argues, 'coming out' can occur too early in which queer proclamations are greeted by hostility or 'feigned indifference' or can occur too late in which the speaker's integrity and honesty are called into question: 'because if you had been honest you would have come out earlier' (p. 35). The moment of 'coming out' therefore holds a 'double-edged potential for injury' (Sedgwick 1990, p. 81).

Contained within the rhetoric of the 'coming out' narrative is the binary logic of disclosure as a 'good' and righteous act and non-disclosure as 'bad' or dishonest (McLean 2007; Rasmussen 2004). McLean (2007) identifies this binary as the 'disclosure imperative' in which there is an implied assumption that 'coming out' is a

good or beneficial process. This is despite the harm and trauma which may consequentially follow: ‘the idealisation of coming out constructs a binary of disclosure that positions coming out as “good”, as it enables the healthy development of sexual identity, and positions non-disclosure as “bad”’ (McLean 2007, p. 154). Furthermore, engaging in the practice of ‘coming out’ can present the individual speaker with limited, polarised options—to be either in or out (Rasmussen 2004).

Moving from theoretical to empirical discussions of the ‘coming out’ narrative, social researchers sway between the beneficence and the harms attached to ‘coming out’. Within social work and psychology literature, some researchers advocate for the psychological and interpersonal benefits of ‘coming out’ for lesbians and gays, such as increased self-esteem and improved familial relationships (LaSala 2000), while others have pointed to the attached dangers and risks, particularly for young people (D’Augelli, Hershberger & Pilkington 1998; Green 2000; Telford 2003). ‘Naming’ queer sexualities to others, such as family members, can be a highly distressing process for young people, with potentially violent repercussions (Telford 2003). D’Augelli et al (1998) have surveyed the experiences of young queer people in ‘coming out’ to parents and reported how expressions of physical violence, family victimisation and threats of abuse can ensue post-disclosure.

The disclosure of queer sexualities to others may not be automatically directed towards family members, particularly if familial relationships remain tenuous. Disclosure may be more rewarding when targeted towards selected friends as ‘families of choice’ (Green 2000). For instance, young queer people in Australia have reported their friends as preferred candidates for disclosure (Hillier et al 2005, p. 65). Conversely, Gorman-Murray (2005, 2008) argues that the family home can function as a nurturing and supportive space for queer children and young people ‘coming out’: ‘heterosexual identity does not pre-determine heterosexist reactions and attitudes’ (Gorman-Murray 2005, p. 8). Indeed, LaSala’s (2007b) qualitative interviews with young gay men who were ‘out’ to their families suggest that parents may be a valuable resource in encouraging their queer children to practice safer sexual practices.

The social practice of ‘coming out’ locates sexuality as the central motif of identification for queer individuals. There is an assumption implicit within ‘coming out’ stories that

non-heterosexual people assume a fixed identity as a 'gay' subject (Herkt 1995, p. 41). However, sexual identity may not be the definitive feature of individual biographies as young people negotiate multiple social identities across gendered, classed and ethnic lines (Davies 1992; Pallotta-Chiarolli 2000). Savin-Williams (2005) argues that the 'new gay teenager' of contemporary US society is no longer reliant on conventional lesbian and gay identities but is alternatively redefining a new vocabulary of sexual description. This decentering of the conventional 'coming out' story in young queer people's identity-narratives fits with Plummer's (1995, p. 139) proposal that as contemporary society has entered 'late modernity', older narrative forms have lost their coherency and linearity. Instead, a new generation of voices are refashioning the 'coming out' story (Plummer 1995).

The 'coming out' narrative has provided the epistemological backdrop for the generation of developmental models of sexual identity. As the cultural popularity of the 'coming out' narrative grew in intensity so too did academic preoccupation with models of identity development. The two most commonly cited are the developmental stage models of Cass (1979) and Troiden (1979, 1988). Originally focused on 'male homosexuals' then later redeveloped to focus on homosexual adolescents, Troiden's (1979, 1988) theory of homosexual identity development is based on four key stages: *sensitisation, identity confusion, identity assumption and commitment*. These four stages provide a summarised journey of young lesbian and gay-identifying people becoming aware of their 'sexual difference' and integrating new perceptions of themselves as 'homosexual' (Troiden 1988). Similarly, Cass (1979) outlines a six-stage theoretical model of homosexual identity development from identity confusion to a congruent status of identity synthesis. Both models raise questions regarding the plight of young queer people who do not reach the developmental stage of 'committing' to or 'synthesising' their sexual identity within these normative frameworks.

Stage development models represent sexual and gender identities as objects of knowledge, analysis and truth. In consequence, these models tend to 'universalise' gay identities as a common source of social affiliation and a taken-for-granted way of being 'queer' in the world (Harwood & Rasmussen 2004, p. 396). Identity development models homogenise young queers into a monolithic population, which does not encapsulate the complexity of young people's identities as always in flux and

construction (Cohler & Hammack 2007; Savin-Williams 2005, p. 81). Neither do these stage-models give adequate attention to the broader heteronormative institutions and cultures through which young gays and lesbians grow and develop (Miceli 2002, p. 202). Historically, however, these models were successful in shifting the focus away from pathological attempts to 'cure' homosexuality and to centre instead on more affirmative models of sexuality development (Miceli 2002, p. 202).

Narratives of struggle and survival

Narratives of struggle and survival, or what Cohler and Hammack (2007) describe as 'narratives of struggle and success', contain storylines of homosexual oppression which emphasise the social restraints and life-challenges that hinder the psychosocial development of young queer people. As Warner (1993) eloquently states, heterosexual ideology '...bears down in the heaviest and often deadliest ways on those with the least resources to combat it: queer children and teens' (p. xvi). The following stream of research narratives demonstrates the psychosocial effects of heterosexual ideology and heteronormative injury.

Prior to their emergence in the 1980s as a constructed identity cohort, young queer people have historically been perceived as either non-existent or rightfully hidden within social sciences and youth studies (Cohler & Hammack 2007; D'Augelli & Grossman 2006; Miceli 2002, p. 199). Recent research inquiries into young queer people's lives have played a vital role in addressing this knowledge gap. As an outcome of living and developing in heteronormative cultures and homonegative environments, young queer people have reported numerous negative social and emotional responses including increased risks of homelessness (Dunne, Prendergast & Telford 2002; Irwin, Winter, Gregoric & Watts 1995; Van Leeuwen, Boyle, Salomonsen-Sautel, Baker, Garcia, Hoffman & Hopfer 2006); self-harming and suicidal behaviours (D'Augelli, Grossman, Salter, Vasey, Starks & Sinclair 2005; D'Augelli, Hershberger & Pilkington 2001; Fordham 1998; Kitts 2005; Nicholas & Howard 1998; Remafedi 2002; Wichstrøm & Hegna 2003); mental health effects such as lowered self-esteem, depression and heightened psychological distress (D'Augelli & Hershberger 1993; D'Augelli,

Pilkington & Hershberger 2002; Ueno 2005; Waldo, Hesson-McInnis & D'Augelli 1998); and, excessive alcohol and other drugs use (D'Augelli 2004; D'Augelli & Hershenberger 1993; Hillier et al 2005; Smith, Lindsay & Rosenthal 1999; Ziyadeh, Prokop, Fisher, Rosario, Field, Camargo & Austin 2007).

While not wishing to deny these social and emotional challenges, concerns have arisen over the representation of young queer people in social science research and the predominant focus on the struggles and life-challenges of growing up queer. In general, the age-span of 'youth' is widely understood as a 'problematic' period of transition to adulthood, a life-phase of 'storm and stress' that is characterised by conflicts with significant adults and engagement in 'risky' behaviours (Filax 2006; Griffin 1997; Wyn & White 1997). Similarly, the lives of young queer people have been represented as 'problematic' and 'risky' within educational, social policy and social work literature (Filax 2006; O'Brien 1999; Talburt 2004a; Trotter 2001). Savin-Williams (2001; 2005) argues that a vast amount of research on young queer people is limited by its focus on life-difficulties. This paints a monolithic picture of young queers and signifies a preoccupation with what goes wrong in their lives. The rich tapestry of talents, skills and strengths that are regular features of young queer people's everyday lives, like any other young person, are not adequately acknowledged: 'We learn little about the lives of queer students except for their problems' (Rofes 2004, p. 50).

This singular focus on problem-saturated accounts of young queer people's lives has been criticised by numerous writers as conveying totalising stories of distress, damage and injury, and not sufficiently reflecting the diversity of queer youth. This perspective is encapsulated in several critiques. Talburt (2004a, p. 118) argues that the theoretical positioning of young queers 'at risk' contributes to their life-stories as 'suffering, isolated and suicidal' subjects. Russell, Bohan & Lilly (2000, p. 79) discuss the prominence of the 'suffering and suicidal queer script', which represents young people as immersed in social and psychological problems. Harwood (2004) articulates how the 'discourse of woundedness' transmits a conservative understanding of young queer people's sexual lives and discursively regulates what kinds of sexual experiences, pleasures and relationships are spoken about within institutional settings such as schools. These points of critique raise fundamental questions of how do researchers approach the lives of young queer people in a more holistic, affirming and enabling manner.

Narratives of agency

A focus on victimisation alone negates the accomplishments and agency of young queer people (Blackburn 2007). Instead, narratives of agency recognise and appreciate the strengths, skills and experiential wisdom of young queer people. Narratives of agency focus on the capacity for young queers to actively respond against and refute homonegative expressions and heteronormative ideals. In a similar vein, Russell et al (2000, p. 83) have discussed the authorship of 'transformational scripts' by young queer people. These are storylines of affirmation and celebration in which young people transcend the constraints of homosexual oppression. At present, this collection of narratives is not as widely acknowledged as the other two narrative-streams discussed in this chapter.

From a strengths perspective, Anderson (1998) argues that social workers need to be more attuned to the internal and external strengths exhibited by 'gay youth' in their adolescent experiences. Miceli (2002, p. 209) believes that young queer people have a strong sociological awareness of their encounters with homophobia. This awareness develops through interaction with peers, via cultural mediums such as the media and through participation within heteronormative institutions. Mollie Blackburn (2007) argues that young queer people are in the strongest position to exercise agency when able to identify with multiple subjectivities rather than one subject position over another:

... only when youth can claim multiple subject positions, including but not limited to the identities of victims and agents, they can point to and name the oppressions they experience and negotiate and work against those oppressions, thus increasing their agency (p. 51).

In reference to Butler (2004), Blackburn (2007) acknowledges that agency can only be enacted within limited discursive fields, depending on the subject positions available to young people at the time. However, this does not diminish the possibilities for young people to actively resist and refute homonegative and heteronormative discourses.

From a Foucauldian standpoint, agency does not necessarily grant the freedom to stand outside discursive fields or to be removed from discourse. Rather, it is the capacity to recognise how one is positioned within particular discourses: ‘to resist, subvert and change the discourses themselves through which one is being constituted’ (Davies 1991, p. 51). Davies (1991) has argued that our sense of self always transcends the meanings imbued within one single discourse. Individual actors have the capacity to access alternative discourse or to bring together a new combination of discourse through the power of spoken and written language. As Sondergaard (2002) articulates there are many ‘variations’ in the use and reconstruction of available discourse by individual subjects: ‘Subjects never merely mirror the discourses and practices through which they take up their lives. There will always be a potential tension between the discourses and practices available and the subjects’ interpretation and use of them’ (p. 199). From the postmodern critical social work literature, Pease and Fook (1999, p. 16) argue that individuals have the political agency to reject the ways in which they are positioned in discourse and generate ‘emancipatory discourses’.

The agency of young queer people is vividly illustrated through Hillier and Harrison’s (2004) metaphor of ‘finding the fault lines’ (p. 81). This refers to young people’s resistance to homophobic discourses and their identification of the cracks and inconsistencies conveyed within taken-for-granted discourse. An example from their national study was the ways in which young queer people adopted the term ‘homophobia’ to reframe expressions of hostility as indications of a wider social problem rather than their individual fault while refuting sexually-prejudiced beliefs that did not sit comfortably within their own values framework (Hillier & Harrison 2004). Young queer people regularly demonstrate their agency and foresight in transgressing the socially and culturally imposed conventions of heterosexual normalcy.

Summary

This second discussion has examined the dominant narrative-streams circulating in the social sciences and lesbian and gay studies, which both represent and inform other knowledge bases about the lives of young queer people. ‘Coming out’ narratives

typically represent disclosure as a restricted, dichotomous choice between being ‘in’ or ‘out’ of the closet. The process of ‘coming out’ can hold both beneficial *and* harmful effects. Within this narrative, sexuality is positioned as a definitive aspect of human identity that may not hold the same significance for all young queer people. Narratives of struggle and survival highlight the psychosocial problems for young people in negotiating queer subjectivities in homonegative and heteronormative environments. This set of stories has recently faced criticism for portraying a singular, totalising story of young queer people immersed in psychological distress and suffering. Conversely, narratives of agency recognise the capacities, skills and strengths of young queer people in resisting and refuting homonegative expressions and heteronormative ideals.

Concluding comments to this chapter

In this chapter, I have critically explored the socio-cultural context of young queer people in the workplace and in doing so articulated the theoretical background to this inquiry. From the two main discussions presented in this chapter, there are four key threads that are particularly pertinent to this study and its findings.

First, the concept of sexuality itself is central to the organisation, subjectification and oppression of erotic bodies. Sexuality has been theorised as both a politicised knowledge-structure and a system of social organisation that classifies and locates individual subjects across hierarchies of erotic identities. Within these social hierarchies, heterosexuality is routinely privileged over other sexual subjectivities. Second, while acknowledging the wide berth of terminology for comprehending the foundations of sexual marginalisation, I believe that the concept of homonegativity, as theorised by Russell and Bohan (2006), is a distinctly useful concept for understanding homosexual oppression. This is because of its recognition of anti-homosexual sentiment as a discursive and pervasive language system that departs from pathological definitions of oppression. Furthermore, the concept of homonegativity emphasises that all human actors have a responsibility in its circulation. Third, a significant outcome of sexuality-

based oppression in Western societies is the ways in which non-heterosexual people are frequently the targets of homophobic violence. This kind of violence conveys denigrating and subjectifying messages about victim's bodies and identities as well as causing mental and physical injury. Consequently, queer individuals, including young queer people, learn to 'discipline' their bodies and exercise practices of safety and body mapping to ensure their safety across public and social settings.

Fourth, within social research young queer people as an identity cohort can be perceived from multiple angles and positioned across competing narrative representations: 1) as a distinct cohort of young people traversing similar developmental trajectories; 2) as a social group experiencing severe social and emotional distress from heteronormative harm and injury; and 3) as resourceful agents in refuting and resisting homophobic expressions and beliefs. I believe that one form of narrative representation should not be privileged over another. All three perspectives together provide a layered and comprehensive portrait of the lived experiences of young queer people. In the following chapter, I focus on the background literature to the research problem—the negotiation of queer sexualities in the social setting of the workplace.

CHAPTER THREE

Queer sexualities in the workplace

Introduction to the chapter

In the previous chapter, I presented the first part of the literature review and outlined the theoretical anchors relevant to this study's focus on how young queer people experience the workplace. This chapter considers the workplace context to the research problem introduced in Chapter One. To accomplish this, I examine the literature from a multi-disciplinary approach, encompassing the disciplines of social work, management, human resources, human geography, gender studies and social and vocational psychology. I approach the workplace as a sexual and gendered environment and focus on the literature investigating how queer workers experience and negotiate organisational politics, dynamics and hierarchies. This review is structured into four key domains evident in the literature: 1) the (hetero)sexualised workplace; 2) queer sexualities in the workplace; 3) the development of inclusive work cultures; and 4) preliminary concerns raised for the participation of young queer people in paid employment.

In the first section, I examine the literature on how workplaces are constructed as both sexualised and heterosexualised spaces. This encompasses critical discussions on deconstructing the primacy of the public/private divide in the workplace, dispelling assumptions of the workplace as an asexual environment and troubling the demarcations between working lives and sexual lives. The discursive construction of sexuality, gender and power in organisational structures is examined. In the second section, I present the empirical evidence of previous workplace studies and unravel the collective story of the problematic workplace as a site of discrimination, harassment and abuse against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender-identifying (LGBT) workers. Within this body of literature, I examine how oppressive practices of homophobic abuse and discrimination permeate the power and politics of workplace relations. This includes examining intrinsic dimensions to the collective story of the problematic workplace such as the

psychosocial and organisational impact of discriminatory treatment, the complexities of 'coming out' at work, and the discursive effects of silence in work-based relationships.

In the third section, I attend to the literature discussing the micro, mezzo and macro mechanisms applied to develop inclusive work cultures and remedy sexuality-based discrimination. I begin by critically examining the mechanisms of inclusion implemented at a macro level, introducing the equal opportunity laws operating in Australian states and territories. I then examine the implementation of organisational models, policies and procedures at a mezzo level. Finally, I consider the micro strategies reported by queer workers in seeking to redress discriminatory treatment on their own terms. In the fourth section, I conclude by identifying some tentative themes from the literature about young queer people's participation in the workplace context.

The (hetero)sexualised workplace

Work is work, and sex is sex, and never the twain shall meet
(Schultz 2003, p. 2063).

Contrary to this assertion, workplaces are sexualised environments in which individual workers negotiate competing sexual desires, practices, values and identities. The gendered configuration of the workplace, geographical location, position within occupational and industrial fields as well as the individualised beliefs and values of 'the worker' all constitute the socio-cultural climate of the sexualised workplace. In this section, I present the key argument that the workplace is socially organised as first, a sexualised space and second, as a heterosexualised space. Within heterosexualised workplaces, heterosexuality is normalised and privileged over other sexual subjectivities.

The public/private binary and the asexual workplace

The workplace is a sexually charged environment in contrary to the managerial myth that organisations function as asexual and rationalised spaces. Schultz (2003) argues that productive, working relationships are by no means the only relationships fostered between employees. The dominant belief of the workplace as an asexual space is perpetuated through the binary of public versus private worlds. For over thirty years, feminist theorists and activists have critiqued the cultural logic of the public/private binary and the social divisions it has enforced between male and female bodies, and heterosexual and homosexual bodies (Thornton 1995b; Morgan 1996). The public/private binary is an effective means of maintaining both patriarchal and heterosexist relations in Western societies (Duncan 1996, p. 128). Within this binary relationship, women's lives are traditionally confined to the private sphere of the family unit. In contrast, men's lives are located in the more authoritative space of the public sphere: 'The public sphere has been consistently represented as the sphere of rationality, culture and intellectual endeavour, whereas the domestic sphere has been represented as the sphere of nature, nurture, non-rationality' (Thornton 1995b, p. 11). Conventionally, the workplace has been associated as an essentially masculinised terrain while femininity has been constructed as 'out of place' in the modern labour market (McDowell 2003, p. 101).

As discussed in the previous chapter, Sedgwick (1990, p. 70) has brought attention to the ways in which the binary logic of the public/private divide operates in conjunction with the heterosexual/homosexual binary. The public/private distinction parallels the divide between social and sexual life in which compulsory heterosexuality structures the social realm and is: '...defined primarily in terms of social identification, for instance [dichotomous] identities such as 'wife'/'husband'; 'girlfriend'/'boyfriend'; 'mother'/'father' are rooted in heterosexuality' (Richardson 1996, p. 13). In Western societies, sexual acts are commonly believed to be restricted to the confines of the private bedroom; the public domain is no place for sexual desire. Duncan (1996, p. 137) argues that this dominant divide between public and private realms ignores the contradictions of heterosexual expressions and relationships that habitually cross this boundary. In contrast, lesbian and gay identities are merely tolerated under the popular

argument that what people do in the privacy of their own bedrooms is their business as long as they ‘do not flaunt it in public’ (Herek 1992, p. 94; Myslik 1996, p. 159). Naturalising heterosexuality helps shroud its unspoken dominance in public spaces (Myslik 1996, p. 150; Valentine 1993b). As a naturalised cultural arrangement ‘people are oblivious to the way [heterosexuality] operates as a process of power relations in *all* spaces’ (Valentine 1993b, p. 396, emphasis in original text). In effect, the public/private divide is a powerful mechanism for regulating non-heterosexual subjectivities and imposing requirements of seclusion and exclusion across public settings.

The presence of queer subjectivities in the workplace disturbs the false separation of work and sexuality that functions in tandem with the private/public divide (Woods & Lucas 1993, p. 5). Traditionally, the workplace has been inscribed as an asexual space (Duncan 1996, p. 138). Paid employment, waged labour, the market place and processes of production are commonly associated with participation in the public sphere whereas sex and sexuality is conventionally perceived as a private matter. Human qualities of passion and intimacy are naturalised as belonging in the private sphere, the antithesis to paid employment (Duncan 1996, p. 128; Skidmore 2004, p. 237).

Historically, rationalist perspectives have driven the separation between the workplace and sexual bodies. Rationalist thought has operated as a privileged discourse within capitalist organisations (Fleming 2007, p. 242). In reference to classical management theories and the principles of scientific management proposed by Frederick Taylor, Schultz (2003, p. 2066) discusses how rationalist perspectives on the workplace inform the asexual imperative in the workplace. Sexual pleasures and desires have been defined in essentialist terms as ‘personal’, individualised dynamics that have no place within the sterile environment of work. Human sexuality threatens the productivity of workers and upsets the rational ordering of the workplace:

If work is the sphere of rationality and order, and if the irrational side of life must be kept at bay, then it is clear that sexuality must be banished. Few forces are perceived as more at odds with rationality than sexuality (Schultz 2003, p. 2073).

Burrell and Hearn (1989, p. 12) have described this as the exclusionary perspective in organisational theory that sustains the separation of the 'world of sexuality' from the 'world of work'. Contrary to the exclusionary perspective, it can be argued that sexuality and intimacy contribute to the 'fabric and foundation of organisational life' (Schultz 2003, p. 2071).

Sexuality, gender and power in the workplace

Sheppard (1989, p. 139) has identified a common assumption in the organisational literature: sexuality and gender are frequently discussed as systems of difference perceived to be pre-existing before human actors enter the workplace, as if these social systems were inscribed in workplace settings 'prior to consciousness'. In contrast, a relational understanding of power recognises the productivity of power in generating systems of difference within workplace environments: 'sex, gender and sexuality emerge as a product of power relations' (Skidmore 1999, p. 510). Burrell & Hearn (1989, p. 15) state that sexuality is constructed through workers located in sexually coded positions and identities. From a Foucauldian perspective, these authors argue that sexuality, like power, is not an individual possession, 'a thing', which is brought into the workplace from the outside world by individual actors. Alternatively, sexuality is constructed, contested and negotiated within work-specific contexts (Burrell & Hearn 1989, p. 13). Power relations are continually negotiated between paid workers as sexual and gendered subjects as 'the workplace is a key site for the (re)production, construction, utilisation and concealment of sexualities' (Skidmore 1999, p. 510).

Within workplace dynamics, sexuality should not be regarded as a merely oppressive force; like power, it is constructed and contested through both repressive and resistant relationships (Pringle 1989, p. 167). Discussions of sexuality and power in organisational research frequently waver between the conceptualisation of sexuality as a mechanism of control or as an active means of resistance to dominant organisational cultures and practices (Fleming 2007). Fleming (2007, p. 252) proposes that it is a 'multi-levelled combination of both' as staff and management members alike continually negotiate power relations of control and resistance across the discursive field of sexuality.

As well as a sexualised environment, the workplace has been frequently discussed as a gendered environment by feminist authors. Indeed, feminist theorists and activists first demonstrated the importance of examining sexual behaviours at work by raising awareness of sexual harassment as a social and organisational issue (Gutek 1989, p. 56). Over the last twenty years, the prevalence of sexual harassment against primarily women workers has also been increasingly recognised as a gendered problem in Australian workplaces (Mason & Chapman 2003). Joan Acker (1990) has argued that organisations are not gender-neutral, abstract spaces occupied by disembodied workers. Instead, workplaces are gendered spaces, organised around definitions of 'the worker' as a rational, emotionally neutral male; this gender-biased configuration feeds into wider gender-based hierarchies (Acker 1990). The working body has also been theorised as a signifier of sexual and gendered imagery through which workers embody sexual and gendered norms (McDowell 1995, 2003, 2004; Dellinger & Williams 1997; Skidmore 1999).

Writers such as Linda McDowell (1995) have examined how sexual and gendered signifiers are conveyed through the working body, from external appearances such as dress codes through to informal codes of conduct. For example, in the corporate finance sector, male merchant bankers are often required to wear a single corporate suit that symbolises the 'sober, besuited and preferably heterosexual family man' (McDowell 1995, p. 88). For women workers, makeup is frequently worn and read as a signifier of heterosexuality (Dellinger & Williams 1997). This does not mean that paid workers are necessarily submissive to established norms on workplace presentation. However, as Skidmore (1999, p. 512) states, aesthetics are equally important to all workers who wish to remain situated within heteronormative standards of presentation.

Recent discussions of the embodiment of sexual and gender norms in the workplace have garnered interest in the rapidly expanding service industry as a feminised job sector. The term 'feminised' refers to the disproportionately higher number of female employees in this sector (Adkins 1995, p. 8). McDowell (1995, p. 77) has argued that as service-based economies expand so too do 'embodied, gendered and sexed performances' become increasingly tied to paid employment. Adkins (2000) further argues that the performance of worker's bodies as feminised and sexualised subjects has become an instrumental economic resource, intrinsic to the worker-consumer relationship. In short, sexuality and

power is now recognised in the literature as an inherent dimension within work and consumer-relationships. This includes a critical focus on the ways in which heterosexuality is enshrined in workplace relations.

The workplace as a heterosexualised space

Everyday social relationships between co-workers involve sexualised performances in which heterosexuality is regularly privileged as the dominant norm (McDowell 1995, p. 86). Bruni (2006) argues that heterosexuality maintains its privileged status within organisations through a process of ‘cathexis’: the ‘skilful social process of ordering bodies, sexualities, desires, symbols, discourses and artefacts into a coherent arrangement’ (p. 313) that is ritualistically interpreted as a naturalised state. The privileging of heterosexuality within workplace relations has implications for female as well as queer working bodies. Heterosexual identities are organised along gendered lines of inequality. Within the workplace, this has frequently resulted in the sexualisation of women workers and their exclusion from participation within masculinised domains (Humphrey 1999, p. 146; Morgan & Martin 2006).

It can be argued that the workplace, like many other social spaces, functions as a *heterosexualised space*. From the discipline of human geography, Gill Valentine (2002) defines space as relational to everyday life—cultural meanings and relations produce material and metaphorical spaces just as particular spaces inform the formation and performance of embodied identities. Social spaces are sexually coded spaces in which individuals negotiate gendered and sexualised interactions (Valentine 2002, p. 146). For queer people, everyday spaces are often experienced as ‘heterosexualised spaces’ that are imbued with heterosexual practices, expressions and implied values of nuclear family arrangements; the workplace is no exception (Valentine 1993b, p. 410). Valentine (1993a; 1993b) has examined the ways in which lesbian women negotiate everyday spaces in the UK, including the workplace. From Valentine’s (1993b) study, lesbian women reported sexuality-based discrimination at work, feeling unable to speak about their intimate lives with others, and feeling pressured to ‘pass’ as heterosexual in what they perceived as patriarchal organisations. The concealment of lesbian identities at

work not only reinforces social invisibility but ‘feeds the spatial supremacy of heterosexuality’ (Valentine 1993b, p. 410).

Heterosexuality is heavily accentuated in the workplace through bodily expressions, language, text and symbolism. Signs that symbolise heterosexuality in the workplace are visible through the imagery of wedding rings on fingers and displayed photographs of spouses through to more manifest signifiers of heterosexual relations such as casual discussions of husbands, wives and descriptions of married life (Valentine 1993b; Ward & Winstanley 2003). The private lives of heterosexual workers are common currency at work as evident in informal and regularly exchanged accounts of leisure activities shared with partners, confiding of familial difficulties or the routine telephoning of partners (Valentine 1993b, p. 402). The subtle signifying of heterosexual metaphors and the repetition of heterosexualised discussion in the workplace reinforces the ‘normality’ and naturalised appearance of heterosexuality. In doing so, the absence of other sexual expressions is accentuated (Humphrey 1999; Myslik 1996; Sykes 1998).

Summary

This section has outlined key claims from the literature that the workplace is configured as both a *sexualised* and *heterosexualised* space. The cultural logic of the public/private binary is intrinsic to the structuring of the workplace as an asexual space. This logic is conveyed in rationalised arguments of the workplace as removed from the intimate realms of sexuality. Alternatively, power relations negotiated in the workplace are suffused with sexual expressions, values and relationships. Workplaces can also be configured as heterosexual spaces in which heterosexuality operates as a dominant organisational arrangement that overshadows the expression of non-normative sexualities. Heterosexual dominance is reinforced through the gendered embodiment of organisational norms on presentation and performance, and through signifiers, shared imagery and spoken reference to heterosexual relationships. While these heterosexual signifiers and images may be innocuous, their signification and display highlight the absence of non-heterosexual subjectivities in the workplace.

Queer sexualities in the workplace

In this second section, I introduce the empirical studies that have examined the organisational tensions surrounding the visibility of queer sexualities in the workplace. These studies contribute to a collective story of the workplace as a problematic space for queer workers. I first introduce the studies of sexuality-based discrimination and abuse, which lie at the centre of this collective story, before drawing out the nuances of this story. To achieve this I elaborate on: the negotiation of multiple identities (including sexuality) within problematic work environments; the experiences of queer employees within certain work cultures and industries; and the detrimental effects of working in homophobic environments. To conclude, I expand on two interconnected dimensions intrinsic to participation in problematic workplaces: negotiating the politics of disclosure, and the discursive power of silence in work-relationships.

Stories of discrimination and harassment in the workplace

The collective story of the problematic workplace has been informed by organisational studies from the UK, US and Australia, which have poignantly illustrated the types of abuse, discrimination and harassment experienced by queer workers. The majority of the workplace studies contributing to this common story are based on self-reported accounts of sexuality-based abuse and discrimination. McDermott (2006, p. 195) notes that research in this field has chiefly emerged from North America, and has attracted mainly white middle-class participants located in professional occupations who identify with lesbian and gay identities. The experiences of employees in lower socioeconomic employment or 'blue-collar' positions are under-represented. Likewise, few studies have examined the working lives of queer people who do not associate their lives with conventional lesbian and gay identities. This skew in sampling is reflected in numerous studies reported in this chapter (see Chrobot-Mason, Button & DiClementi 2001; Griffith & Hebl 2002; Ragins & Cornwell 2001; Ragins, Cornwell & Miller 2003; Rostosky & Riggle 2002; Smith & Ingraham 2004; Waldo 1999).

Previous research provides a baseline indication of negative treatment against queer workers by relying on reports of ‘perceived discrimination’. This is opposed to what social scientists and policy makers define as ‘actual discrimination’ (Badgett 1996, p. 44). In general, work discrimination refers to ‘unfair and negative treatment of workers or job applicants based on personal attributes that are irrelevant to job performance’ (Chung 2001, p. 34). Direct discrimination includes discriminatory acts perpetrated against queer workers whereas indirect discrimination refers to workplace cultures, policies and practices that result in unequal participation and access to resources typically available to heterosexual employees (Chung 2001). While these definitions may be intelligible to social and vocational researchers, they may not be as meaningful to individual victims of workplace prejudice. Consequently, this shapes the kinds of incidents reported as ‘discrimination’, and more importantly, what may remain unreported.

From the Australian labour market, a small collection of surveys indicates that the experience of workplace discrimination, harassment and abuse is a painful social reality for many non-heterosexual employees (Asquith 1999; GLAD 1994; Irwin 1999; Pitts et al 2006). *The Pink Ceiling is Too Low* (Irwin 1999), a national survey of over 900 lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender-identifying (LGBT) workers spanning across work industries, presents a detailed picture of sexuality-based discrimination and harassment in Australian workplaces. A key finding from this survey was the widespread existence of heterosexism and homophobic actions in workplaces: experiences of discrimination occurred across all workplaces, regardless of industry, occupation or type of organisation and were perpetrated by other employees as well as customers and clients (Irwin 1999). Over half the survey respondents (59%) reported some kind of homophobic or discriminatory treatment in their current and/or previous workplace (Irwin 1999, p. 28). This included instances of ridicule, social exclusion, accusations of paedophilia, verbal abuse, violent threats, and physical and sexual abuse (Irwin 1999, p. 30). Within several Australian studies, discriminatory experiences targeting queer workers were often reported as a series of ongoing incidents (Asquith 1999; Irwin 1999). One group of queer respondents (5%) from Irwin’s (1999, p. 37) survey considered that their most recent dismissal stemmed from their sexuality. Queer workers from the UK have reported similar discriminatory treatment including visible displays of

embarrassment or discomfort from other staff through to more explicit actions of exclusion, verbal abuse and physical intimidation (Colgan et al 2006).

Reported experiences of prejudicial treatment in Australian workplaces have included employee perceptions of unfair rostering, feeling over-supervised, being given unreasonable workloads and the sabotage of individual work (Irwin 1999). Queer workers have also reported indirect forms of discrimination that disadvantage queer employees in wider policy. For example, entitlements granted to heterosexual employees that were denied to non-heterosexual staff, and their same-sex partners, included partner access to superannuation and compassionate and carer's leave (Irwin 1999, p. 36).

There are no innocent spaces free from sexuality-discrimination, regardless of occupational or professional status. Humphrey's (1999, p. 136) interviews with lesbian and gay public servants in the UK highlight discriminatory encounters such as being discharged from military service, being 'outed' in the national tabloids or being transferred to another work location. Evidently, holding professional status or higher educational levels in middle-class occupations does not protect employees from homophobia. Other studies have reported the discriminatory treatment experienced by queer employees in white-collar settings, including medicine and nursing (Druzin, Shrier, Yacowar & Rossignol 1998; Rondahl, Inyala & Carlsson 2007) and academia (Frank 2006; Russ, Simonds & Hunt 2002; Taylor & Raeburn 1995).

Negotiating multiple identities in the workplace

Queer workers negotiate multiple social identities in the workplace, not just singular identities as 'queer' subjects. Accordingly, their work experiences are shaped by converging systems of social stratification. Acker (2006) refers to these convergent points between socially marginalised identities as 'inequality regimes': '...loosely interrelated practices, processes, actions, and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender, and racial inequalities within particular organisations' (p. 443).

Experiences of work-based discrimination can vary between queer women and men. Lesbian women working in Australia have been more likely to report multiple forms of discrimination in comparison to gay men (GLAD 1994, p. 24; Irwin 1999, p. 38). Lesbian women have reported incidents of public questioning, unwelcome disclosure, and the spread of rumour and gossip as recurring forms of anti-lesbian violence (Asquith 1999, p. 11). Invariably, the participants in Asquith's study knew their harasser. These findings build on earlier studies of lesbian women in the workplace from the US that demonstrate how lesbian workers both anticipate and experience work-based discrimination (Levine & Leonard 1984).

It is difficult to distinguish whether discrimination against lesbian workers is perpetrated on the basis of sexuality or gender, or whether women-employees are situated in dual work cultures of heterosexism and sexism (Asquith 1999, p. 10). Lesbian women and gay men have also reported varying forms of homophobic abuse at work. Lesbians may experience more subtle forms of persecution whereas gay men may be the victims of more physically violent acts (Humphrey 1999). It is also noted that lesbian women may be more likely to be located in lower-paid and precarious employment in comparison to gay men, as indicated in the Victorian Gay Men and Lesbians Against Discrimination (GLAD) survey (1994, p. 24). This may increase their vulnerability to discrimination and its material effects.

Other forms of 'multiple discrimination' experienced by Australian queer workers encompass social factors of age, class, disability and HIV status (Irwin 1999, p. 38). Queer workers with disabilities in the UK have reported difficulties in negotiating multiple stigmatised identities; these decisions are further complicated by feeling excluded from wider queer and disabled communities (Chung 2003; Colgan et al 2006, p. 48). Employees living with HIV face discrimination on several levels based on their sexuality and health status and additional challenges in maintaining their ongoing healthcare and adhering to strict medicinal routines in work time (Chung 2003). Queer employees from non-English backgrounds may experience dual expressions of 'horizontal hostility' from colleagues who share the same ethnic background, diminishing their available support networks (Rosabal 1996, p. 20).

Queer employees' experiences of the workplace are likewise shaped by wider class structures (McDermott 2006). Class can be defined as 'enduring and systematic differences in access to and control over resources', chiefly linked to financial resources in economically advantaged societies (Acker 2006, p. 444). From McDermott's (2006) interviews with lesbian women, workers in middle-class professions were more likely to be situated in greater positions of power, status and confidence. In contrast, women employed in working-class occupations reported having to regulate their own behaviours and expressions in a more guarded manner; this sometimes involved maintaining a 'heterosexual masquerade' (McDermott 2006, p. 203).

Variations across occupational and industrial cultures

'Queer' experiences vary between organisational environments. Studies of specific occupational settings and industries provide a nuanced examination of work cultures and practices (Ward & Winstanley 2006). The term 'culture' is in reference to specific systems of meanings and values that vary across occupational groups and organisations and are both influential and relational to the social dynamics and informal roles occupied within the workplace (McLean, Lewis, Copeland, Lintern & O'Neil 1997, p. 143; Seck, Finch, Mor-Barak & Poverny 1993, p. 70). The shared beliefs and expectations of organisational members can generate informal norms and rules that govern the behaviour of individual employees. This can also generate stressors for employees who are evaluated negatively through established organisational norms (Seck et al 1993, p. 70).

The symmetry between male-dominated work cultures and homophobic environments is discussed in the literature. Within Australian workplaces, male dominated industries such as 'manufacturing/mining/construction' were reported as the most likely occupational groups for homophobic abuse to occur (Irwin 1999, p. 39). Other studies have illustrated the exclusionary effects of queer employees working in male-dominated workplaces, including working-class industries such as the UK fire service (Ward & Winstanley 2006) and US bakeries (Embrick, Walther & Wickens 2007). This encompasses male-dominated groups within occupations such as engineering (McLean et al 1997, p. 154), and corporate finance (McDowell 1995, p. 85). These studies

demonstrate that masculinised and heterosexualised work cultures are not singularly bound to working-class industries.

Embrick et al (2007, p. 764) have discussed how homosexual-oriented jokes can reinforce white male solidarity in male-dominated work cultures through the representation of gay men and lesbians as the sexual other. Similarly, McLean et al (1997) have noted how workplace humour fosters a culture of belonging for men located in the in-group by emphasising the inferiority of 'women, homosexuals, and marginalised racial or ethnic groups' (p. 147). Sexual humour and joke telling in masculinised work environments can be a covert method for undermining the validity of others, such as lesbian and gay employees. This kind of humour often conveys allusive messages of subordination that protects the joker from having to take responsibility for the consequences of their spoken words (Crawford 2000; McLean et al 1997; Ward & Winstanley 2006).

Queer sexualities are explicitly excluded within institutional settings that operate along strict gendered lines of segregation such as the military, religious clergy, and child-care settings (Appleby & Anastas 1998, p. 243). The experience of queer employees working with children accentuates wider cultural anxieties that queer adults pose a supposed threat to the sexual innocence of children. McCreery (1999) has described a discourse of 'endangered children', which has informed popular arguments espoused by anti-gay protesters in the US seeking to 'protect' children from openly gay employees and carers. Within this discourse, '...homosexuality is emblematic of hedonism, disease, promiscuity, and moral and spiritual decay, with individual homosexuals abusing children literally and defiling their innocence figuratively' (McCreery 1999, p. 41).

The presence of queer workers in the school classroom disturbs the institutional encoding of heterosexist silence. Consequently, the closet, and its veil of silence, is a recurring dimension for queer teachers. Queer teachers have discussed how they learn and adhere to practices of concealment and denial within educational settings; these oppressive practices develop from the constant fear of being misperceived as a sexual predator and concerns for placing one's career and professional reputation in jeopardy (Clarke 1996, 1998; Ferfolja 1998, 2007; Morrow & Gill 2003; Sykes 1998). To identify or be identified as 'queer' in the classroom carries little protection from schooling

institutions and potentially leaves teachers open to physical and verbal harassment from students and colleagues. These occupational tensions generate an unpredictable source of stress for queer teachers in ‘managing’ their sexualities in school-environments (Ferfolja 1998, 2007; Russ, Simmonds & Hunt 2002).

The psychosocial and vocational impact of discriminatory treatment

Working in discriminatory and abusive work environments can detrimentally affect the physical and mental wellbeing of targeted employees. From Irwin’s study (1999), 60% of queer employees in Australian workplaces believed they had experienced depression after experiencing homophobic treatment. Seventy-six percent (76%) of respondents reported stress and anxiety, and 45% of respondents indicated they had become ill as a consequence (Irwin 1999 p. 52). Psychological studies have likewise drawn attention to the negative mental effects of labouring in heterosexist cultures, indicating increased psychological distress and depression (Driscoll, Kelley & Fassinger 1996; Smith & Ingraham 2004; Waldo 1999), and the debilitating effects of additional stressors such as the receipt of minimising or blaming responses from other staff members (Smith & Ingraham 2004).

Encounters with homophobic abuse and discrimination can detrimentally impact on queer employees’ participation in the workplace across factors such as absenteeism, motivations to quit and general dissatisfaction with work (Waldo 1999); extended use of sick leave (Irwin 1999, p. 55); and compromised productivity and ability to focus on work-duties (Powers 1996). To help endure hostile work environments, queer employees may rely on various coping methods, such as seeking out informal networks for support, socially isolating oneself within the workplace or avoiding social contact with others (Powers 1996).

Sexuality-based abuse and discrimination can adversely affect workers’ vocational, and therefore economic, stability. In Australia, 157 queer respondents stated they had resigned from their employment because of their experiences of homophobia at work; many others (284) who had experienced similar treatment had considered resigning

(Irwin 1999, p. 56). Queer workers in the UK who had experienced discrimination and harassment had sought to transfer between work departments or alternatively vacate their position (Colgan et al 2006; Colgan, Creegan, McKearney & Wright 2007).

Resigning does not always imply failure or acquiescence to abusive work environments. From her inquiry into experiences of workplace bullying, Lutgen-Sandvik (2006) has re-interpreted the vacation of toxic work environments as an active means of resistance to bullying behaviours. Organisational studies define workplace bullying as the repeated, persistent and unidirectional mistreatment of other employees in the workplace. The intention of perpetrators is to intimidate, pressurise and bring distress to selected targets and to make them feel inferior (Hodson et al 2006; Jennifer, Cowie & Ananiadou 2003; Kelly 2007; Lutgen-Sandvik 2006, 2008; Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracey & Alberts 2007; Saunders, Huynh & Goodman-Delahunty 2007). Lutgen-Sandvik (2006, p. 425) argues that resigning can be a means of resistance by refusing to participate in abusive work-relationships. Resigning sends a clear message as evidence by absence that an injustice has occurred against the vacating employee. However, this needs to be weighed against recognition that exodus from the workplace can provide a convenient form of control for the organisation and perpetrators concerned as the vacating employee's voice is 'muted' (Lutgen-Sandvik 2006, p. 425).

The politics of disclosure and 'coming out' in the workplace

The politics of 'coming out' and self-disclosure, the process of revealing 'private' information to others about one's sexuality, can have momentous implications for the social and economic status of queer workers. Hence, it is a significant dimension in the collective story of the problematic workplace. Deciding to disclose can be both beneficial and detrimental in consequence. This highlights the complexity of negotiating the disclosure process across the public/private divide: 'Non-disclosure reinforces public/private divisions, while disclosure can often disrupt the seemingly fixed divisions that operate at work. However, it can also bring down the full weight of anti-lesbian [homophobic] violence' (Asquith 1999, p. 11). Consequently, workers may rely on the

public/private divide by considering their sexuality a 'private' concern and hence justifying their decisions to not 'come out' at work (Ferfolja 2007; Humphrey 1999).

Reportedly, 'coming out' is a fundamental decision in the career paths of queer workers as the first step in a life-long process that is repeated to each new audience in a never-ending cycle of dispelling heterosexual presumption (Humphrey 1999; Ward & Winstanley 2005, 2006). Queer workers are often required to assess whether to 'reveal or conceal' their potentially stigmatised identity at work (Clair et al 2005). The workplace literature discusses processes of 'identity management' in which queer workers seek to maintain a selective degree of control over the disclosure process (Anastas 2001; Chrobot-Mason et al 2001). Some queer workers have reported the emotional response of fear as both a mobilising force in providing the motivation to speak out and as an immobilising force in generating barriers to disclosure (Ragins, Singh & Cornwell 2007; Rondahl et al 2007). Patterns of disclosure are often dependent on organisational climate and work-team culture; 'coming out' does not occur in a social vacuum. To illustrate, supportive organisations with anti-discrimination policies and other inclusive policies have been positively correlated to queer workers' disclosure status as 'out' employees (Griffith & Hebl 2002; Rostosky & Riggle 2002).

Alternatively, living in the organisational closet is a paradoxical space in which queer employees are routinely integrated into the workplace while a significant segment of their life remains excluded (Woods & Lucas 1993, p. 5). Queer workers may rely on a number of strategies for 'passing': intricate measures for camouflaging aspects of the sexual self and for posing as a member of the dominant social group (Clair et al 2005; Leary 1999). Strategies for 'passing' rely on the presumption of heterosexuality in the workplace (Woods & Lucas 1993, p. 69). This may include strategies of concealment, such as 'dodging the issue' in which queries about one's personal life may be quietly avoided or the avoidance of all work situations that may involve conversations about relationships. It may also entail laborious measures such as presenting to others as 'asexual' or appearing disinterested in conversations about romantic relationships (Chrobot-Mason et al 2001; Clair et al 2005; Emslie 1998; Woods & Lucas 1993).

The most intricate strategy for 'passing' at work is what Woods and Lucas (1993) have referred to as 'counterfeiting': the arduous process of presenting false information about

oneself to construct and present a heterosexual identity (p. 75). One ‘counterfeiting’ measure may be the invention of stories about ‘straight’ romantic partners (Day & Schoenrade 2000). For gay men this could involve appealing to the conflation of gender conformity with heterosexuality (Woods & Lucas 1993, p. 85). Performing heterosexuality for lesbian women may entail the signification of conventional feminine markers that refer to the binary opposite, masculinity, such as conversational references to boyfriends, marriage and childbearing (McDermott 2006, p. 204). Sykes (1998) has argued that queer women working in the field of physical education and sport have to work especially hard at signifying heterosexuality to avoid suspicion, as women in sport are frequently associated with stereotypes of gender inversion.

All of these strategies require a vast amount of energy and concentration, and can be extremely stressful, anxiety provoking and exhausting to sustain (Gonsiorek 1993; Levine & Leonard, 1984; Woods & Lucas 1993). Furthermore, the tactics of ‘passing’ do not remove the threat of involuntary disclosure from other employees (Badgett 1996; Ward & Winstanley 2005). Involuntary disclosure or ‘outing’ can occur in seemingly innocuous ways, for instance the assumptions of colleagues based on ambiguities in marital or relationship status (Badgett 1996). More malicious methods have also been reported such as the intentional ‘outing’ of queer workers to others (Colgan et al 2006, p. 54; Irwin 1999).

In disclosing their sexuality, queer employees may deploy a range of methods including: ‘signalling’ by dropping hints and clues, such as an interest in particular literature or queer-related current events; ‘normalising’, by accentuating the commonalities between oneself and others and minimising sexual difference; and ‘differentiating’ by presenting one’s sexuality as equally valid as any other yet still explicitly different (Clair et al 1999, p. 83; Woods & Lucas 1993). More explicitly political strategies of ‘coming out’ involve ‘dignifying difference’ and ‘politicising marginality’ in which positions of sexual difference are embraced by individual workers and are emphasised as an organisational asset (Woods & Lucas 1993, p. 188).

Workplace studies emphasise the psychosocial and vocational benefits of disclosure in the workplace. These studies reiterate the social imperative attached to ‘coming out’—disclosure is healthy while non-disclosure is unhealthy, as similarly discussed in the

previous chapter. Reportedly, disclosure in the workplace reinforces attitudes of psychological commitment to the workplace; is associated with less conflict between work and home life and less likelihood of leaving; and is correlated with higher levels of job satisfaction (Day & Schoenrade 1997, 2000). Numerous negative effects of living the 'double life' in the organisational closet are also reported, such as: the impact on self-esteem and self-worth; less positive attitudes towards work and careers in comparison to 'out' queer employees; the physical and emotional strain of remaining in the closet; and, from a human resources perspective, a substantial amount of employee's time, concentration and energy expended on sustaining the closet's protective walls (Colgan et al 2006; Ragins et al 2007; Ward & Winstanley 2005).

These findings need to be cautiously counter-balanced by the previous evidence presented that illustrates the discrimination and abuse experienced by queer workers. In his survey of gay male workers in the US, Tejeda (2006, p. 56) found that respondents who had disclosed their sexuality to supervisors experienced an increase in expressions of hostility while not disclosing was positively linked to receiving higher promotions. In this sense, keeping queer sexualities silent may be vocationally rewarding and personally safer in some instances. Decisions of self-disclosure need to be contextualised within specific work cultures and should not be read through a dichotomous lens as either 'good' versus 'bad', 'in' versus 'out' or 'disclosure' versus 'silence'. 'Coming out' at work is a considerably more complex and situated decision-making process than these binary relationships suggest.

Theorising silence in the workplace

Sexual silence is an intrinsic and complex dimension within the collective story of the problematic workplace. Silence, or what Ward & Winstanley (2003) describe as the 'negative space within discourse', is habitually present in the accounts of queer workers. Just as silence is a persistent trait of the closet in queer lives, so too do silences inform and intersect with discourses of sexuality. As Sykes (1998) articulates: '...silence is never just silence. Silences communicate meaning' (p. 164). Silence in the workplace can breed suspicion; the sexual status of invisibly queer employees may be placed under

question (Sykes 1998, p. 168). Silence can be sanctified at an organisational level as organisations may contribute to sexual silences through symbolic practices. One example is the provision of uniforms as a means of imposing uniformity and masking differences (Holliday 1999; Skidmore 1999; Ward & Winstanley 2003, 2006). Organisations can also mandate the silencing of queer sexualities through indirect discrimination, such as failing to recognise queer employees and their relationships in policy (Ward & Winstanley 2003).

Diverging to a queer theoretical perspective, Sedgwick (1990) has argued that the act of 'coming out' repeatedly reinforces the 'power-circuits' of silence operating within and between discourse. This argument is founded on Foucault's (1978) discussion of silence as a discursive practice. Like power, silence and secrecy can operate within and between discourse. Sedgwick (1990, p. 8) discusses how ignorance can constitute a knowledge-structure through which others may actively choose not to acknowledge the sexual desires and identities of queer individuals. Bearing this in mind, 'coming out' in the workplace may not always dispel the pervasive power of sexual silence. The symbolic act of greeting co-workers 'coming out' with silence can signify hostility and resistance to the visible presence of queer identities (Ward & Winstanley 2003, p. 1268).

Ward & Winstanley (2003) perceive the discourse of silence in the workplace as a contradictory position that can be both empowering and oppressive for queer workers. These authors base their discussion on Foucault's (1978, p. 101) theorising of silence and its multiple effects—while silence can be repressive, it can also 'shelter' counter-resistance to dominant discourse. There is power in silence as there is power in discourse, as explained by Ward & Winstanley (2003):

...the withholding of knowledge, which may otherwise provide others with words that can be used as 'evidence' or for 'persecution', can be empowering, and can also provide access into a world of talk that may otherwise be denied to someone (p. 1274).

Ward & Winstanley (2003, p. 1266) examined several ‘themes of silence’ within their qualitative study of lesbian and gay employees and wider employee groups located in a UK government department. As an oppressive force, silence was experienced as suppressive and censoring. However, silence was also discussed in their research as a form of protection and resistance. As a form of protection, silence ensured that queer workers were less likely targets for discrimination, thwarted other workers from responding to their sexual identities in stereotyped ways or prevented losing control over one’s personal information (Ward & Winstanley 2003, p. 1273). As a form of resistance, keeping silent and presenting oneself as sexual ambiguous can signify refusal against assuming a set subject position within a ‘heteronormative agenda’ (Ward & Winstanley 2003, p. 1277).

Summary

The portrayal of the workplace as a problematic space for queer workers is a prominent storyline in the workplace and sexuality literature. This body of literature is founded on reported accounts of sexuality-based abuse and discrimination in work-relationships and experiences of heterosexist work cultures. In this section, I have elaborated on the various dimensions of this storyline, including: the complexity of negotiating multiple social identities in the workplace; the problematic experiences of queer workers in specific work cultures and industries; the psychosocial and vocational injuries sustained from working in oppressive workspaces, and the challenges for queer workers in navigating their way through the contested politics of sexual disclosure and silence in the workplace. The following section focuses on moving beyond the workplace as a problematic space.

Developing inclusive work cultures

There is a third domain of literature within the field of workplace and sexuality studies that discusses the ways in which workplaces can operate as inclusive and safe environments. This body of knowledge has developed in response to queer workers' experiences of the workplace as a problematic space. In this section, I examine how workplaces seek to move beyond monosexual work cultures towards developing inclusive environments that value diverse sexualities. This discussion is divided into three layers, moving from macro mechanisms to micro strategies of inclusion, as identified in the literature. First, at a macro level, I examine the assumptions contained within equal opportunity legislation and its attempts to eliminate work-based discrimination. Second, at a mezzo level, I review prominent organisational approaches, policies, and practices dedicated to building inclusive cultures and managing diversity in the workplace. Third, at a micro level, I outline the individual strategies previously reported by queer workers in responding to discriminatory treatment at work.

Macro mechanisms of inclusion: Equal opportunity laws

At a macro level, queer workers have a limited degree of legislative protection from discrimination in the workplace in the form of equal opportunity (EO), or anti-discrimination, laws. In Australia, EO legislation prohibits discriminatory treatment based on sexuality in various fields including employment albeit in a restricted and inconsistent format across each state and territory jurisdiction (Maddison & Partridge 2007). At present, only NSW, ACT, Queensland and Tasmania legislation includes recognition of vilification, as well as discrimination, on the grounds of sexuality (Maddison & Partridge 2007). Vilification refers to 'a public act of showing and inciting hatred towards, serious contempt of, or severe ridicule of, a person or group of persons' (Nygh & Butt 1998, p. 453). Chapman and Kelly (2005) argue that anti-vilification measures are becoming increasingly relevant to workplace relations as employees seek

redress against incidences of victimisation based on race, gender and sexuality, amongst other social attributes.

Currently, there is no equivalent federal legislation for protecting queer employees from discrimination in the workplace, the exception being the *Workplace Relations Act 1996* (*Commonwealth*). This Act has limited powers in preventing employment termination on the grounds of 'sexual preference' within workplaces that employ over a hundred workers (Maddison & Partridge 2007). The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) has restricted powers to investigate reported cases of work-based discrimination and to provide conciliation mechanisms in response. However, this is no equivalent to the federal outlawing of sexuality-based discrimination (Maddison & Partridge 2007).

While dedicated to removing sexuality-based discrimination, EO frameworks exist in contradiction to Australian state and federal laws that continue to sustain legalised discrimination against queer citizens. For example, a recent national inquiry commissioned by HREOC identified fifty-eight (58) pieces of federal legislation that failed to guarantee same-sex couples and families with children the same financial and work-related entitlements as different-sex couples (HREOC 2007). Furthermore, legal theorists have argued that EO frameworks in Australia are informed by wider dominant discourses of sexual subordination, rather than actually redressing sexuality-based discrimination (Chapman 1996, 1997; Maddison & Partridge 2007; Morgan 1995). These authors raise four key points of critique.

First, EO statutes are riddled with varying exemptions that excuse particular parties and institutions from abiding by anti-discrimination requirements. This includes exemptions on the grounds of working with children or on the foundations of religious doctrine and affiliation. In consequence, these exemptions grant permission for institutions to continue discriminating against queer employees (Chapman 1996, 1997; Maddison & Partridge 2007). Currently, Tasmania is the exception with no exemptions based on sexuality (*Anti-Discrimination Act 1998* [Tasmania]). Second, definitions of sexuality contained within EO legislation typically provide a list of sexualities in which heterosexuality is firmly located at the top, constructing a hierarchical ordering of sexual subjectivities (Chapman 1997, p. 66). This hierarchy re-inscribes the

heterosexual/homosexual binary and in doing so contributes to the production of sexual norms (Morgan 1996; Skidmore 2004). Third, a fundamental question is why heterosexuality needs to be included in EO legislation at all. This is a particularly pertinent question when the original intent of including 'sexual orientation' was to prevent discrimination against non-heterosexual individuals (Chapman 1997, p. 67). Fourth, in relation to language use, some EO laws fail to list 'lesbian' as an identity marker while other statutes refer to 'homosexuality' as an objectifying descriptor that very few individuals identify with (Chapman 1997).

As a general critique, EO legislation tends to be reactionary by chiefly responding to individual complaints rather than sanctioning more positive measures for overcoming structural inequalities across human organisations and services (Asquith 1999; Morgan 1996). EO laws are embedded in liberal notions of equality, tolerance, and the self-determining individual. These principles falsely assume that 'all parties are equal before the law' (Thornton 1994, p. 215), regardless of social positioning (Morgan 1996; Thornton 1994). This liberalist stance does not recognise the inequities that may exist in financial resources and legal representation between individual complaints and their cases against organisational bodies (Thornton 2000, p. 13). While in principle all citizens may share the same legal rights under the law, gay men as a social group have historically held a criminal status under Australian state and territory legislation while lesbian women have a legal history of invisibility (Maddison & Partridge 2007; Mason 1995). In order for individual complainants to feel confident in accessing legal systems, they must consider themselves full citizens of the state. Lesbians and gays have not yet been granted equal citizenship (Asquith 2004, p. 101).

EO proceedings are littered with inequities that disadvantage complainants. In legal proceedings, the responsibility lies with the individual victim to seek out redress through costly legal processes (Thornton 2000, p. 12). It is the responsibility of the complainant to bear the burden of proof in demonstrating that the act of discrimination occurred. Complainants are required to give primacy to only one aspect of their identity and life-experience. This simplifies what can be a multi-dimensional experience of discrimination occurring on the grounds of a number of attributes, for example lesbian workers encountering discrimination based on gender *and* sexuality (Asquith 1999; Kendall 1996).

Ultimately, the pursuit of discrimination and vilification complaints requires fortitude, courage, and resilience from the complainant (Thornton 1994, 2000). Complainants often pursue their cases in an altruistic spirit, seeking a formal acknowledgment of injustice and an assurance that such events will not occur to others in the future (Thornton 2000, p. 23). To make a stand against unjust workplace practices and to engage voluntarily in legal systems where so much responsibility is placed on the individual complainant can be interpreted as a 'dissident act' that has political, as well as individual, ramifications for change (Thornton 2000). Fifty (50) respondents from Irwin's (1999, p. 61) survey of queer workers in Australia had pursued action against their employers through legal measures; half of these people reported a positive outcome.

Mezzo mechanisms of inclusion: Organisational approaches, policies and procedures

From a social work perspective, Mor Barak (2000, p. 339) has defined an inclusive workplace as an organisational culture that values individual and inter-group differences within the organisation and the local surrounding community (Mor Barak 2000, p. 339). In seeking to build inclusive work cultures, many organisational studies emphasise the balance between workplace policy and practice. Clair et al (2005) suggest that affirmative organisational policy, transparent decision-making and the presence of other visibly queer staff members all contribute to an organisational context in which queer employees will feel safe. Likewise, affirmative policies that aim to remove discrimination, that exceed minimum workplace requirements, that are not perceived as symbolic or tokenistic, and that are reinforced through training and implementation, can make significant contributions to generating safe work cultures (Appleby & Anastas 1998; Clair et al 2005; Colgan et al 2006; Ragins & Cornwell 2001). Further, Appleby and Anastas (1998, p. 242) stipulate three core elements for fostering inclusive work environments: 1) a non-discrimination policy including sexuality; 2) diversity education including address of sexuality and gender identity issues; and 3) equitable staff policies that extend benefits and entitlements to all employees.

In this section, I critically examine the approaches, policies and procedures discussed in the literature for developing sexually inclusive work cultures. This includes approaches to diversity management and other mechanisms such as the delivery of staff diversity training and the implementation of inclusive policies and procedures.

Approaches to diversity management

Within the human resources literature, inclusive work cultures are frequently spoken of in tandem with the concept of ‘diversity management’ (Konrad 2003; Prasad, Pringle & Konrad 2006). The concept of workplace diversity has arisen over the last twenty years in response to the exclusion of systemically disadvantaged groups (Prasad et al 2006). From their case study of equity practices and policies implemented in UK workplaces, Colgan et al (2006) identified five approaches to diversity management:

- 1) Legal compliance approach—from this approach, organisations abided by minimal legal requirements specified in workplace and EO legislation (p. 32).
- 2) Workforce diversity and inclusion approaches—these approaches recognised the value of a diverse and creative workforce for ‘organisational success’ (p. 34).
- 3) Business case & market based approaches—these approaches sought to build a diverse workforce that best catered for meeting the market of the wider community. Reportedly, this type of approach is common in the private sector (p. 36).
- 4) Community diversity approach—this approach recognised the need to tailor services to a socially diverse community. Mostly local authorities and public services have implemented this approach (p. 35).
- 5) Moral based approach—this approach was founded on organisational principles and values such as the principle of equal opportunity (p. 33).

Organisational approaches to diversity management vary between business and trait models, and cultural assimilationist and pluralist models. Business and trait models emphasise workplace diversity for the purpose of increasing productivity and enhancing organisational capacities (Konrad 2003). Cultural assimilationist and pluralist models emphasise the integration of minority groups into the majority context (Prasad et al 2006, p. 4). Noon (2007, p. 780) believes that business approaches individualise what are essentially social justice arguments and subsequently, suppress the recognition of social inequalities. These models are not sector-specific as Colgan et al's (2006) research shows that both moral-based and market-based approaches can be implemented across public, voluntary and private sectors.

'Diversity management' is more than ensuring that diverse social groups are represented within the workplace administratively; it has a moral basis in the valuing of difference and the acknowledgement of historical oppression of socially disadvantaged groups (Noon 2007; Prasad et al 2006). Janssens and Zanoï (2005) argue that approaches to diversity management should be context-specific and conditional. Their argument reinforces caution against what Mor Barak (2000, p. 347) describes as the 'one size fits all' approach. Diversity management models frequently associate workplace diversity with essentialised differences that external actors bring into the workplace. An essentialised perspective ignores the continual and situational negotiation of power relations between management and employees (Janssens & Zanoï 2005).

Delivering staff diversity training

Diversity training programs have been delivered in some workplaces as an educational process for addressing employees' 'learned prejudices' and building pluralist work cultures (Button 2001; Day & Schoenrade 2000). These programs have mainly focused on gender and ethnic diversity; sexuality is a more recent addition. Adding another 'minority group' to existing diversity programs is problematic. It can generate moral tensions and interpersonal conflicts between employees' individual belief systems (Kaplan 2006). Social work authors have argued that additive approaches to practice and educational models reiterate false assumptions about queer individuals as a homogenous ethnic group. This ignores the interplay of individual and social differences within this

cohort and replicates dominant ideas of essentialised identities (Hicks 2008; Hicks & Watson 2003). Equally, diversity programs that focus on ‘learning about minorities’ achieve little in troubling wider heterosexist cultures.

Approaches to diversity training vary. Facilitators may organise LGBT speaker bureaus or external guest speakers to address staff audiences; these approaches can reportedly have a powerful impact on audience members through methods of storytelling (Creed & Scully 2000). McNaught (1997, p. 411) similarly suggests inviting lesbian and gay speakers to give firsthand accounts of ‘queer’ experiences. Creed and Scully (2000, p. 402) point out that as ‘outsiders’ guest speakers can always walk away from challenging audiences whereas queer employees can be left enduring the same work conditions. From their experiences of participation observation in lesbian and gay speaking panels, Crawley and Broad (2004) observed how queer speakers often reiterated a formulaic ‘coming out’ story to their audiences. Consequently, speakers neglected to convey the ‘variability and diversity’ of their life-experiences (Crawley & Broad 2004, p. 50).

Stewart (1997, p. 335) argues that sexual orientation training in organisations needs to be context-specific and relevant to its audience, rather than delivering generic “Homo 101” courses. Diversity training programs need to reflect the organisational, occupational and historical climate of the workplace. Respondents from Colgan et al’s (2006, p. 110) study emphasised the importance of making staff awareness training compulsory for all employees. Compulsory training, however, may have an adverse affect in which employees feel disgruntled in being forced to attend, rather than having a more positive and willing engagement with their learning.

Implementing inclusive policies and procedures

Implementing non-legally mandated policies and procedures that are affirmative of sexual diversity can be highly symbolic for queer workers, particularly policies that grant equal recognition and entitlements to same-sex partnerships (Button 2001; Ragins & Cornwell 2001). Proactive policies that exceed legislative requirements signal to queer workers the value of their contributions. This includes policies such as the extension of domestic partner benefits to same-sex partners, the provision of bereavement and sick

care leave for queer employees in recognition of their familial responsibilities, and the public support of lesbian and gay community events (McNaught 1993 cited in Anastas 2001; Appleby & Anastas 1998; Button 2001; Clair et al 2005; Colgan et al 2006; Spielman & Winfield 1996).

The presence of other queer workers within organisations can arguably provide positive support for queer employees and a resource for monitoring policy implementation and the provision of training and mentoring. This can occur through the active appointment of queer-identifying managers and supervisors or through the establishment of LGBT groups and networks (Button 2001; Colgan et al 2006; Poverny 2000; Ragins, Cornwell & Miller 2003; Seck et al 1993). However, concerns have been raised by UK employees that LGBT groups and networks are typically staffed by gay men in professional and managerial roles. These representatives lack knowledge and experience in articulating the needs of lesbian women, workers with disabilities or employees in manual labour-based occupations (Colgan et al 2006, p. 136).

Implementing inclusive policies and procedures is not without its challenges.

Organisations may be reluctant to officially endorse the inclusion of queer employees for fear of losing disapproving customers, business partners or other stakeholders such as concerned community members (Appleby & Anastas 1998, p. 241; Poverny 2000). The lack of reported evidence of discrimination and harassment of queer employees can be an additional barrier (Colgan et al 2006, p. 103). Conversely, this evidence-gap results from the invisibility of queer workers. Cultural dimensions can also create barriers such as the prevalence of religious conservatism in some organisations or stagnant work cultures that are resistant to change (Colgan et al 2006, p. 103). The lack of adequate resources and managerial support can generate further challenges at higher levels of governance (Colgan et al 2006, p. 103). Despite these challenges, large employers have succeeded in implementing inclusive policies and procedures that reportedly give equal recognition to queer employees. This includes UK-based organisations such as IBM and the public office of the Greater London Authority (Stonewall 2008), and private corporations listed in the US Fortune 500, such as American Express (Poverny 2000). The question remains as to whether this is equally achievable for smaller organisations that are not as well resourced.

The effectiveness of inclusive policies and procedures

Effective policy implementation can depend on various factors such as workplace culture, industry-type and location. In spite of formal policy requirements, workplace practices are typically governed by informal rules and cultural norms (Ward & Winstanley 2006). Inclusive work cultures may be sustained through the 'goodwill' of individual colleagues and members of management (Skaines & Cowan 2003). Workplace cultures can also be heavily influenced by the beliefs and values espoused by senior staff members as organisational leaders (Poverty 2000). From Irwin's (1999) survey, the existence of positive policy and practice measures was related to the type of industry and occupation. People employed as managers, health practitioners and human service workers were more likely to work in settings that had implemented inclusive measures. In comparison, people working as tradespersons, unskilled workers or in hospitality settings were the least likely to work in settings with implemented EO measures (Irwin 1999, p. 26). Humphrey (1999, p. 145) argues that queer employees working in organisations located in urban enclaves may be in a far more powerful position to champion for EO strategies in which politically motivated queer networks and organisations are available to provide support. Queers employed in rural and regional areas may not be as well resourced.

Numerous empirical studies have established positive relationships between inclusive policies and procedures and the ensuing benefits for both queer employees and their employing organisations. Reportedly, 'gay-friendly' workplaces can lead to increases in employee happiness, enhanced enjoyment of the job and greater openness in communication (Colgan et al 2006, p. 119). The existence of both internal anti-discrimination policies and supportive top management have been directly associated with higher levels of job satisfaction and commitment from lesbian and gay-identifying workers (Colgan et al 2006; Day & Schoenrade 2000; Wright et al 2006). Studies of queer employees in the US indicate significant statistical relationships between affirmative workplace policies and employee's reported satisfaction with supervisor relationships (Tejeda 2006); lower reporting of experienced and observed acts of discrimination (Ragins & Cornwell 2001); and lower perceptions of 'treatment discrimination' or unfair treatment in areas such as performance-based rewards (Button 2001). A more recent Australian survey of gay men employed in a range of industrial settings highlights significant links between inclusive factors such as high levels of

support and fair treatment in the workplace and reported high levels of organisational commitment and career satisfaction (Trau & Härtel 2007).

Micro strategies of inclusion: Individual strategies for responding to discrimination

At a micro level, queer workers may implement their own strategies in response to discriminatory treatment. To illustrate, just over a third (36%) of queer participants who had experienced homophobia and discrimination in Australian workplaces had pursued some form of action (Irwin 1999, p. 58). The most popular response was to speak to senior staff members about their experiences while the second most popular response was to speak directly to the harasser. A positive outcome was not guaranteed from this second course of action (Irwin 1999, p. 59).

Not all queer workers are willing to pursue their concerns through formal organisational channels, such as grievance procedures. Reasons cited by both UK and Australian queer employees for not pursuing formal recourse included difficulties in substantiating complaints and articulating the basis of discrimination; and, the most common reason cited, fear of further reprisal and personal cost (Colgan et al 2007, p. 600; Irwin 1999, p. 63). Informal strategies for seeking redress include telling another person outside the workplace, deflecting offensive comments with humour, ignoring discriminatory remarks or attempting to educate others (Asquith 1999, p. 14; Colgan et al 2006, p. 98).

Creed & Scully (2000, p. 410) argue that the deployment of identity through speaking practices such as disclosure and dialogue can be instrumental in achieving interpersonal and organisational change in the workplace. From their interpretive analysis of queer workers' experiences, Creed and Scully (2000) developed a framework of 'encounters' that assist in the development of inclusive work cultures. For example, 'educative encounters' (p. 399) involved intentional references to LGBT-identities for the purposes of raising awareness while 'advocacy encounters' (p. 404) entailed queer workers having direct input into management, policy and practice (Creed & Scully 2000).

In one respect, all of these informal strategies symbolise the enactment of agency by individual workers in seeking to enable change on their own terms and to exercise power over what can be highly demoralising circumstances. On the other hand, it is left up to the individual to redress what may be a wider systemic issue within the organisation. Furthermore, incidents of abuse and discrimination may be left unreported on a formal level, hiding the mistreatment of queer workers from view. Similarly, 'educative' or 'advocacy' encounters may not always be realistic strategies as not all individuals have the capacity or knowledge to facilitate educative conversations. As Humphrey (1999) argues: '... to be lesbian or gay is not a magical status which confers enlightenment as regards to all sexual and gendered questions' (p. 147).

It is uncertain as to how effective involvement from Australian trade unions may be in responding to sexuality-based discrimination; this topic deserves greater attention in the literature. According to Irwin's (1999, p. 60) survey findings, contacting an external union was reported as the least popular action pursued by workers in response to homophobic and discriminatory treatment. From Asquith's (1999, p. 8) small survey of trade unions affiliated with the Labor Council of NSW, the majority of unions reported no provision of services specific to lesbian women. Many unions did not perceive a need for lesbian and gay-specific services. Some exemplary unions provided services such as lesbian and gay-support staff and anti-discrimination training on sexuality (Asquith 1999, p. 8).

Morgain (2004) argues that there has been 'a long history of labour movement support for lesbian and gay rights' (p. 7) in Australia, citing several media cases of collective solidarity against homophobic-discrimination. While these cases demonstrate the collective power of union support, this evidence does not guarantee that trade unions are committed to providing services that are accessible or relevant to queer employees. External service providers through Employee Assistant Programs may be more appropriate for providing confidential support services to queer employees and for advising on the implementation and evaluation of diversity measures (Poverny 2000, p. 88). The burden of educating and advocating for organisational change is thus shared and, in some instances, an external officer can more safely intervene on the behalf of others.

Summary

This section has focused on the mechanisms and strategies geared towards developing inclusive work cultures that provide safe and equitable environments for non-heterosexual employees. At a macro level, legal protection from individual experiences of discrimination exists in the form of equal opportunity laws, which hold limited powers to address wider heterosexist arrangements. At a mezzo level, there exists a range of organisational approaches, policies and procedures for developing sexually exclusive work environments. Reportedly, significant policies that aim to build inclusive work cultures need to extend beyond baseline legislative requirements and implement proactive measures that ‘walk the talk’, such as the equal recognition of same-sex relationships. Experiencing discrimination and abuse may propel individual employees to seek out their own means of redress through micro strategies of inclusion. Individuals pursuing these strategies do so without formal support or guarantee of protection from reprisal. Furthermore, their experiences of abuse and discrimination may be left unheard in the wider organisation.

Locating young queer people in the workplace context

As discussed in Chapter Two, young queer people routinely encounter, and anticipate, homonegative abuse and heteronormative assumptions across social settings such as schools and family homes. While these experiences are documented in existing social studies, to my present knowledge the voices of young queer people are largely absent from the literature investigating sexualities at work. The majority of the cited studies in this current chapter do not focus on age-specific cohorts or alternatively, focus on older sample groups with mean ages in the thirties and forties. Some studies include younger people under twenty-four years (for example Asquith 1999; Driscoll et al 1996; Irwin 1999; Woods & Lucas 1993). However, these studies do not explicitly focus on experiences distinctive to this age group.

Several Australian studies suggest tentative themes in this field. Emslie's (1998, p. 167) short case study of young queer workers suggests that isolation and hiding are two common themes for queer youth at work. One significant concern is that young queer workers may attribute negative experiences in their workplace to their own sexual status and competence as opposed to recognising the impact of homophobia (Emslie 1998, p. 166). While Hillier et al (2005) do not provide a specific figure from their second national survey of 'same-sex attracted young people', they do report that in the context of experiencing discrimination: 'It was not uncommon for young people to describe work-based discrimination in which they were sacked, denied promotion or treated differently because of their sexuality' (p. 34). From Irwin's (1999) national survey, 'almost' 28% of queer respondents reported resigning or not applying for a particular job because of their sexuality or transgender identity; 'this was most likely to occur in the under twenty-five age group' (p. 37). This may be a preferred response for young queer people who anticipate discriminatory treatment at work.

As part of a larger qualitative study of queer workers in the UK, a series of focus groups were facilitated with young workers (16–22 years old) alongside case study interviews with twenty-four (24) young people under thirty years of age (Colgan et al 2006). The majority of young people recounted experiences of homophobia at work, and

consequentially believing they could not be 'out' in the workplace. Young participants who reported 'coming out' early in their careers were often located in organisations in which EO policies were enforced (Colgan et al 2006, p. 43). It is unclear whether young workers selected these organisations because of these policies or serendipitously discovered their existence after commencing employment. All of these themes sensitised me to the potential stressors faced by young queer people in the present study.

Concluding comments to the chapter

In reviewing the literature on sexuality in the workplace, I have advanced three main arguments. First, despite the rationalised myth of the workplace as an asexual space, the workplace operates as a sexual and gendered environment. Furthermore, the workplace is frequently configured as a heterosexualised space in which heterosexual norms, signifiers and imagery are privileged, formally and informally, in organisational environments over non-normative sexualities. Second, the workplace is widely experienced as a problematic space by queer workers in Western labour markets. This is based on self-reported accounts from queer employees about their encounters with sexuality-based discrimination and abuse. Third, there have been a number of approaches implemented to develop inclusive work environments for queer workers and to remedy sexuality-based discrimination. These approaches extend from introducing equal opportunity legislation at a macro level through to exercising individual strategies at a micro level.

This chapter concludes the first part of this thesis focusing on the background literature to the research problem. From this review, two converging points brought me to this inquiry into the experiences of young queer people in the workplace: 1) the absent voices of young queer people within the workplace and sexuality literature; and 2) the collective story of the workplace as a problematic space for queer workers. From these two convergent points, I formulated the central research question: *How do young people experience the workplace as queer workers?* In the following chapter, I describe how I

pursued this research question methodologically and the research methods I applied in generating a response to this question.

CHAPTER FOUR

Research Methodology and Design

Introduction to the chapter

In the previous chapter, I identified a significant gap in the literature in giving voice to young queer workers' stories of the workplace. In this chapter, I focus on the methodological approach I took in addressing this gap and in bearing witness to young people's accounts of working life across Australia. The purpose of this chapter is to outline the pragmatic journey of 'doing' the research and implementing an appropriate methodological framework and suitable methods that effectively address the research question of *'How do young people experience the workplace as queer workers?'*

This chapter is divided into six components. First, I discuss the methodological framework for this study; this includes justifying my selection of a qualitative approach and introducing the philosophical underpinnings of the constructivist paradigm. Second, I describe the sampling methods deployed and the process of advertising and recruiting participants. Third, I detail the three qualitative methods applied in generating young queer people's accounts of the workplace: web-based surveys, online interviews and face-to-face interviews. Fourth, I discuss the ethical considerations given to the application of these interview methods and throughout the research process in general. Fifth, I outline the process of data analysis and discuss the two methods of thematic analysis and constructivist grounded theory that were used to develop the findings. To conclude, I consider issues of reflexivity and trustworthiness in the research process.

Methodological framework

In this section, I outline the methodological framework for this inquiry. I begin by explaining my justification for selecting a qualitative approach to this inquiry before introducing the methodological paradigm of constructivism. By methodology, I am referring to the underlying theoretical and philosophical perspectives, values and knowledge assumptions that informed my selection and application of research methods (Crotty 1998, p. 3).

From a social work perspective, this study is concerned with the ethical and political dimensions of research inquiry for informing change. D'Cruz & Jones (2004, p. 30) argue that social work research is more than the pursuit of knowledge. The overarching objective is to generate knowledge that will assist to 'achieve social justice and improve the social conditions of individuals, groups and communities' (D'Cruz & Jones 2004, p. 30). In alignment with the purpose of my study and the social work principle of social justice, I sought to incorporate a transformative element to the research process. Complementary to a social work perspective, Angen (2000) discusses the principle of 'ethical validation' in qualitative research, which gives emphasis to the moral components of the research. From this principle, Angen (2000) urges researchers to attend to the practicality of their research and its generative potential for social transformation. The esteem of research should be measured by its capacity to contribute to our collective knowledge of humanity and what is required to generate equitable social conditions. In this study, this meant being continually attuned to the ways in which research as a process of knowledge-generation could enrich social workers' understandings of the social and cultural constraints young queer people face in workplace settings.

Justifying a qualitative approach

I decided that a qualitative approach was extremely appropriate for addressing the purpose and aims of the study. A qualitative approach was complementary to addressing the purpose and aims of the study first, by generating rich descriptions of the research problem and second, by focusing on the constraints of everyday working life as experienced by young queer people. Denzin and Lincoln (2003, p. 16) argue that an emic, idiographic perspective is best suited to an inquiry that seeks rich descriptions of individual experiences. Similarly, Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005) state that ‘Qualitative research aims to elicit the contextualised nature of experience and action, and attempts to generate analyses that are detailed, “thick”, and integrative’ (p. 2). Emphasis is given to understanding the meanings and interpretations individuals give to their actions. The interpretative process resides at the heart of qualitative research; that is, seeking to understand the way people attribute meaning to events and experiences, and then linking these interpretations to wider meaning systems and social arrangements (Liamputtong & Ezzy 2005, p. 4; Shaw & Gould 2001, p. 7). Through applying qualitative methods, I was able to examine the meanings young people generated from their experiences in work settings.

From a critical research perspective, qualitative methods are highly suitable for learning how dominant sexual discourses, beliefs and assumptions impact on people’s lived experiences and understandings of sexuality (Gamson 2003, p. 358). This was relevant to my research in seeking to develop a detailed understanding of how broader institutional arrangements affect social and sexual relationships within the workplace context. My decision to adopt a qualitative approach was also informed by Cresswell’s (1998, p. 17–18) discussion of eight reasons for undertaking qualitative inquiry:

- 1) Selecting a qualitative approach for research questions starting with a *how* or *what* in contrast to quantitative approaches which ask explanatory questions;
- 2) Emphasis on the research topic to be *explored* rather than explained;
- 3) Requirement to present a detailed view of the topic;

- 4) Intention to study individuals in their ‘natural settings’;
- 5) Interest in writing in a literary style that uses the personal pronoun and recognises the author’s presence in the study;
- 6) Sufficient time and resources to spend on a comprehensive process of data collection and analysis;
- 7) Having an audience that is receptive to qualitative research and findings, including one’s supervisors and wider discipline;
- 8) Emphasising the researcher’s role as an *active learner* rather than positioning oneself as ‘the expert’.

My research met all eight criteria except for Criterion 4—I did not undertake field research with young people in the ‘natural setting’ of the workplace. I discuss the reasoning behind this decision in later consideration of ethical issues.

Selecting a constructivist paradigm

The methodological framework for my inquiry was informed by a constructivist paradigm. A constructivist approach to qualitative research lies mid-point between postmodernist and post-positivist approaches as it ‘...aims to include multiple voices, views and visions in the rendering of lived experiences’ (Charmaz 2000, p. 525). From a constructivist approach, researchers focus on the individual meaning-maker and uphold each individual as a unique interpreter of their own life-experiences and events (Crotty 1998, p. 58). In the research process, this entails privileging participants’ accounts of their life-experiences. The aim is to build an understanding of *how* and *why* people construct meanings in particular ways within the context of specific situations (Charmaz 2006, p. 130). The philosophical underpinnings of the constructivist paradigm are informed by the ontological standpoint of relativism and the epistemological standpoint of constructionism.

Ontology is the ‘study of being’: theoretical and philosophical propositions of how reality is structured and understood by the human mind (Crotty 1998, p. 10). From a relativist ontological position, human perceptions of reality are constructed through local and specific social interactions. In contrast to a naive realist perspective, reality does not exist as an external dimension that is universally experienced but is alternatively generated through human engagement and dialogue (Denzin & Lincoln 1998, p. 206). As Crotty (1998) states ‘What is said to be “the ways things are” is really just “the sense we make of them”’ (p. 64). Human understandings of reality are contingent upon cultural and historical location as varying contextual conditions produce alternative interpretations of the same social phenomena (Crotty 1998, p. 64). On this basis, there can be no single reality, only multiple realities.

While ontological theories invite us to consider ‘what do we know about reality?’, epistemological theories build on these assumptions by inquiring as to ‘how do we know what we know about reality?’ Guba and Lincoln (1989) emphasise the relationship between the researcher and the researched, and pose the crucial question ‘What is the relationship of the knower to the known?’ (p. 83). A constructionist epistemology recognises that there is no single truth or one valid interpretation of the social world (Crotty 1998, p. 47). From a constructionist standpoint, there are always competing knowledge-claims about the social world, generated through social practices and human interactions: ‘...all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context’ (Crotty 1998, p. 42). Meaning-making is central to knowledge-generation, as the human consciousness constructs meaning of and about the social world. However, this is not to deny the existence of a material world as no object or action can have meaning prior to human engagement and equally no meaning can be bestowed without the presence of an object or other subject to be perceived by the human mind (Crotty 1998). While social realities are still experienced as material reality, the interaction between object and subject is crucial in this interactive process of meaning-making and knowledge-generation (Crotty 1998; Patton 2002).

All meaning-making and interpretation have a social origin, or context, which Crotty (1998) distinguishes as social constructionism. While constructionism is concerned with

how we attribute meanings to objects and subjects, social constructionism is chiefly concerned with the methods through which we generate shared systems of meaning-making. We inherit shared systems of meaning through culture, discourse and language; these systems provide a lens through which we view, interpret and make sense of the world (Crotty 1998, p. 54). From a critical perspective, social constructionists attend to how certain meaning-systems can be regarded as more valid than other forms of knowledge; these are meaning-systems that often serve the interests of a privileged few (Patton 2002, p. 100). Social constructionist perspectives have sensitised qualitative researchers to the voices of people who have been silenced and marginalised by the dominant authority of science and positivism (Crotty 1998, p. 48; Gergen 2001, p. 8). In my research, I approach constructivism as a methodological paradigm that is distinct, but not divorced, from social constructionist and constructionist standpoints.

From a constructivist position, the researcher values transparency and accountability throughout the process of data gathering and openly acknowledges their own influential presence in the research; as Charmaz (2005) states ‘we share in constructing what we define as data’ (p. 509). The presence of the researcher shapes all elements of the research process including defining the research question, relating with participants, and selecting and applying methods of data gathering and analysis (Charmaz 2005, p. 509). The researcher is recognised as the co-constructor of both interview accounts and interpretive accounts of participants’ stories (Charmaz 2006, p. 130). In this sense, like Jennifer Mason (1996, p. 36), I prefer the term ‘data generation’ as opposed to ‘data collection’. This term re-positions the researcher as an active participant in the process of knowledge-creation in line with a constructivist methodology. I further elaborate on the links between a constructivist paradigm and my interview and analysis methods throughout this chapter.

Sampling framework

In this section, I outline the process of recruiting a sample of thirty-four (34) young people to the research project. This encompasses key considerations given to sampling criteria, sampling size, sampling methods, designing and advertising the research website, and selecting recruitment pathways. I conclude by presenting the demographics and characteristics of the sample.

Sampling criteria

The criteria for participation in this study were: i) young people who were aged between sixteen and twenty-six (16–26) at the time of participation; ii) who defined their sexuality as non-heterosexual/not straight; and iii) who were willing to share stories from their current or previous paid employment in a workplace setting located in Australia.

i) Age Range: The minimum age of participation in this project was sixteen years. Legal definitions of the permissible age for young people to leave secondary school and enter the workforce on a full-time basis vary across state and territory boundaries. For example, it is set at fifteen years of age in New South Wales (*Children and Young Persons Act 1998*) and Victoria (*Child Employment Act 2003*) while currently in Tasmania sixteen years is the legally permissible age for young people to enter the workforce on a full-time basis (*Education Act 1994*). These inconsistencies presented difficulties in determining a national age basis. However, for consistency with Tasmanian legislation, sixteen remained the baseline age for participation. The age-limit of youth participation was raised from twenty-four to twenty-six years in recognition that these extra two years would allow a greater time-period to have elapsed for young people who had recently completed tertiary education and were newcomers to more permanent employment.

ii) Sexuality: I invited young people to participate who described their sexuality as non-heterosexual or in plain language, 'not straight'. With regards to advertising the research, it was difficult to select the most appropriate terms that would be recognisable for young audiences. The most obvious choice was to refer to the more widely-recognised markers of sexual identity—lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB). Australian researchers investigating youth and sexualities have avoided imposing lesbian and gay identities on young respondents in recognition that sexual desires and identities may change across time, context and relationships (Hillier & Mitchell 2004; Hillier, Mitchell & Mallett 2007). Alternatively, social researchers have deployed such terms as 'non-heterosexual' (Fraser 2004) or 'same-sex attracted' (SSA) (Dyson, Mitchell, Smith, Dowsett, Pitts & Hillier 2003, p. 5; Hillier, Dempsey, Harrison, Beale, Matthews & Rosenthal 1998; Hillier & Mitchell 2004) in their inquiries. The term SSA widens the sampling net in recognition that while many young people may experience same-sex attractions this may not result in the later formulation of a lesbian or gay identity (Hillier & Mitchell 2004; Hillier et al 2007).

While appreciating the reasoning for emphasising attractions rather than assuming identities, I felt uncomfortable with the term 'same-sex attracted' (SSA) because of its empirical overtones. This academic language seemed far-removed from the everyday vocabulary of young people. It also implies that sexual attractions are singularly bound to gender-specific bodies. Bisexual activists have questioned the 'coding of sexuality' based on gender preference and sought to decentre the prominence of sexual object-choice (Seidman 1993, p. 121). Hence, I deployed the term 'non-heterosexual' in my methods of recruitment as a term that precludes assumptions about young queer people's sexual identities or attractions. Having made this decision, I recognise that references to 'non' identities may be interpreted as a diminishing expression that suggests queer sexualities are invalid or non-existent. This term also relies on heterosexuality as a dominant point of reference from which other sexual subjectivities are defined. These conceptual tensions are not easily resolved; there is space for further reflecting on appropriate language use for future inquiry in this field.

iii) Workplace experience: I requested that all participants have at least six months experience in paid employment in Australia. This could be previous and/or current employment. I made this request so that participants had a substantive amount of

experience to inform their personal accounts. When advertising the project I did not distinguish between taxed and untaxed employment. Additionally, as participants were referred to a specially designed website for the project I had to specify clearly that participation was restricted to young people currently living and working in Australia. This is in recognition that research information uploaded online can be accessed globally (Riggle, Rostosky & Reedy 2005). Several young people inquiring about the research asked whether they had to be 'out' in the workplace to participate. In response, I emphasised that I was interested in all experiences of the workplace and that young queer workers who were not 'out' at work had an equally important story to tell as people who were 'out' in the workplace.

Size of the sample

Thirty-four (34) young people participated between the ages of eighteen to twenty-six from fifty-one (51) expressions of interest. There was no set number required for this study's sample. I continued inviting young people to participate until I felt enough data had been obtained. Deciding on 'how much is enough' in qualitative studies is generally based on having a substantive amount of data to warrant a detailed analysis and to convey a credible and well-evidenced narrative of participants' experiences. This decision is also governed by the researcher recognising that the sample has generated ample data to address the aims of the project in an insightful manner (Liamputtong & Ezzy 2005, p. 49; Patton 2002, p. 245). When I began to note recurring themes and comments within participants' accounts this also signalled that I had obtained sufficient data (Liamputtong & Ezzy 2005, p. 49).

Sampling methods

Three purposive sampling methods were applied in recruiting young people to this project: volunteer, snowball and convenience sampling. Purposive sampling refers to the deliberate focusing of sampling strategies on specific populations for seeking out

‘information-rich cases’ (Liamputtong & Ezzy 2005, p. 46). While this sample was not intended to be representative, I wanted to reach out to a wide pool of young people so I could present a rich tapestry of young people’s working lives that encompassed a diverse range of work settings and occupations. Using multiple methods for sampling assisted in attracting such a diverse group.

Volunteer sampling relies on advertising through a wide-ranging list of recruitment sources and inviting potential participants to self-select to participate (Liamputtong & Ezzy 2005, p. 48). This method was particularly useful in this study for seeking to contact young people who were scattered across local and interstate communities and were not centrally organised around queer communities or located in specific geographical areas. The majority of participants were recruited from this sampling method. Snowball sampling relies on initial participants to inform other potential participants of the research as a means of locating further informants. This method can be effective in making contact with hard-to-reach populations, such as queer youth, through chains of referral (Atkinson & Flint 2001; Patton 2002, p. 237). For this study, I invited each participant to pass on the web-address and my contact details to other young people in their own social and email networks. This technique only resulted in two (2) new participants. This reiterates the limitations in relying on third persons to advertise and promote research (Atkinson & Flint 2001).

Convenience sampling was the least strategic method of recruitment. This method typically relies on easy-to-access groups and communities (Patton 2002, p. 241). Four (4) young people from my peer network participated in face-to-face interviews. This method was useful for expanding the occupational range of the sample as I could invite young people who I knew had worked or were working in industries and occupations that had not been previously discussed. I avoided approaching these young people individually in recognition that people known to the researcher may feel compelled to participate in the research. Instead, I distributed the research advertisements electronically through a group email from which several recipients approached me with an interest in sharing their story.

Research website and advertising

The first step in advertising this project to potential participants was to establish a central point of information about the project—a research website. To view this website, please go to www.utas.edu.au/sociology/sexualities. With assistance from the faculty's technical support unit, I designed a website to act as a one-stop-shop for young people potentially interested in participating. The purpose of the website was to a) provide a point of contact with me as the researcher, and b) act as source of detailed information about the project. The web-address, otherwise referred to as the URL (uniform resource locator), was clearly displayed in all advertisements to guide interested young people to the website, as suggested by other online researchers (Mann & Stewart 2000, p. 221; Mustanksi 2001). The web-address and my email address were the main points of contact listed on all advertisements.

Mustanksi (2001, p. 298) believes that research websites need to be visually appealing and convincing to build participants' confidence in the research and to raise the legitimacy of the project. To ensure this I was assisted by a young graphic designer in developing vibrant logos for the website, which were also used on the research advertisements. These logos were reviewed by several of my younger colleagues to gauge their effectiveness in appealing to the specific population. Please see the attached CD-ROM to browse the research website pages. I also designed the advertisements to be eye-catching for younger audiences. In my initial consultations with service providers working with young queer people, one youth worker suggested using a 'sexy' catch-line to attract people's attention. From this suggestion, I developed two catch-lines as headings: *'How sexy is your workplace?'* and *'Ever had the hots for somebody at work?'* The attached CD-ROM contains a sample of the fliers displayed for advertising the project both online and off-line.

Recruitment sources and pathways

There were three key considerations in selecting appropriate recruitment sources for advertising both online and off-line. First, I targeted sources that were frequently accessed by a wide audience of young queer people. Second, I ensured that all sources were safe and homophobia-free spaces for young queer people to access with confidence. Third, I advertised across a diverse range of sites and services in order to recruit an equally diverse sample group. It was important to include non-queer sites, such as the Youth-Gas network and Youth Health services, to reach out to young people who may not associate with queer identities or communities. My selection of diverse recruitment sources was also guided by other variables such as appealing to urban, regional and rural audiences, advertising through sites and services that catered to both women and men, and utilising sites and services outside of university settings to reach out to a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds.

I advertised the project through five recruitment pathways: 1) electronic postings on websites; 2) emails circulated through email groups and networks; 3) hard copy advertisements displayed in queer-related services and venues; 4) advertisements circulated through youth and health service providers; and 5) interview appearances discussing the project on local and community radio stations. The full list of recruitment pathways and sources is presented in Table 9 in Appendix B. Once potential participants had made contact, I emailed or posted each person further information about the project including a cover letter that introduced myself as the researcher, an Information Sheet and a Consent Form. Appendix A contains a sample of the cover letter sent to potential participants after initial contact. Appendix F contains the Project Information Sheet and Consent Form.

The participants

Thirty-four (34) young people participated in this project. Please see the table in Appendix C for the full list of participants' selected pseudonyms, current age at the time

of research and self-descriptions of their sexuality. The locations of these young people were spread across all Australian states with no participant responses from the two territories, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory. The sample group were aged between eighteen to twenty-six years at the time of participation; there were no participants under eighteen years. The average age of participants was twenty-two (22) and the sample was skewed towards an older population. This did not prevent older participants from discussing their earlier experiences of working life. There was an almost equal divide in gender between men ($n=18$) and women ($n=16$). The majority of young people (29) identified their current residential location as 'urban'; two (2) as living in a 'rural' location; and with three (3) young people in 'regional' locations. Nearly two-thirds of the sample (21) had attended, or were currently enrolled in, university courses in Australia.

In regards to both current and previous occupations, the sample was spread across a range of occupational groups and industries; participants had been employed on a part-time, full-time and casual basis. I identified ten (10) major industries based on participants' current or most recent employment and generated a classification scheme to represent the sample group. Table 1 outlines the number of participants in each identified industry group and examples of job positions within each industry. Most recent employment refers to participants who were not employed in paid work at the time of interviewing due to other life-factors such as parenting responsibilities, tertiary education or transitions in employment.

The two largest groups of participants were each located in 'Customer service and retail' (8) and 'Community, health and human services' (8). Five (5) participants were employed in 'Clerical and administration' and another five (5) participants employed in 'Hospitality and service work'. A small number of participants were located in the industries of 'Education, sport and recreation' (3), 'Manual labour and manufacturing' (2), and 'Public service' (2), and there was one (1) person employed in 'Information Technologies'. As expected there were no young people working in management roles. Since managerial roles require reasonably high levels of work experience and skill level it would be difficult for young people to obtain these positions as relatively new entrants to the labour market. Each participant typically spoke of several workplaces and occupations across their work history that did not necessarily belong to one specific

industry. For example, one young person spoke of working in retail and hospitality before moving into lifesaving and swimming instruction one year later. Therefore, the above classification scheme does not represent their overall work history. Likewise, despite the majority of participants identifying their current location as 'urban', ten (10) young people shared stories from their previous employment in rural and regional settings.

When invited to describe their sexuality, over half the sample of both men and women (17) used the term 'gay' with seven (7) women referring to their sexuality as 'lesbian' and five (5) young people using the term 'bisexual'. One young person described their sexuality as 'homosexual' with 'one-seventh (1/7) heterosexual'. These sexuality categories were not mutually exclusive as five (5) young people additionally used the more politically-orientated term 'queer' to describe their sexuality. Likewise, several young people referred to more than one sexual descriptor. For example, one young woman described her sexuality using several terms, 'queer', 'dyke' and 'lesbian'. Table 10 in Appendix C lists the terms used by participants to describe their sexuality.

Table 1

Number of participants in each identified industry group and examples of job positions within each industry

Identified work industries	Number of participants within each identified work industry (N=34)	Examples of job positions occupied by participants
Customer service & retail	Eight (8)	Car salesperson, computer salesperson, call centre consultant, sales assistant
Community, health & human services	Eight (8)	Addictions counsellor, youth worker, family support worker, community project officer, out-of-school carer
Clerical & administration	Five (5)	Administration assistant, library officer, insurance claims consultant
Hospitality & service work	Five (5)	Bartender, waiter, kitchen hand, flight attendant, gaming attendant
Education, sport & recreation	Three (3)	Primary school teacher, swimming instructor
Manual labour & manufacturing	Two (2)	Cleaner, manufacturer
Public service	Two (2)	Legal advisor, ministerial writer
Information technologies	One (1)	Technology (interface) designer

When invited to describe their gender, nearly two-thirds (21) of the participants responded using conventional dualistic terms of either 'male/female' or 'man/woman'. Three (3) young people who participated through the web-based survey chose not to respond to this question. The remaining participants (10) identified with conventional male and female identities however explained that their self-understanding of gender incorporated both masculine and feminine dimensions or alternatively located themselves outside these conventional gender positions. For example, two (2) young women described themselves as 'androgynous', one (1) young woman described herself as a 'tomboy', and one (1) young man described himself as a 'feminine thinker'. No one identified with or described themselves as 'transgender'.

Data generation methods

I selected three methods of data generation in this inquiry: 1) web-based surveys; 2) online interviews; and 3) face-to-face (FTF) interviews. Table 2 provides a summary of these three methods. The use of multiple methods was informed by two considerations. The first consideration was to broaden the options for participation and hence to maximise young people's participation. The second consideration was ensuring that young queer people had safe options to participate in the research that was on their own terms and in their control. Other researchers have advocated for several methods of participation so that young people are given some opportunity to make their own decisions over how they would prefer to participate (Hillier et al 2005; Hillier et al 2007).

During an eight-month time-period from October 2006 to June 2007, I completed thirteen (13) online interviews and thirteen (13) FTF interviews, and twelve (12) completed surveys were received. The three selected methods were complementary to developing a layered and nuanced account of young queer people's experiences in the workplace. While it was not intended to implement the three methods in separate time-phases, I initially commenced with the online interviewing to assist in building my

confidence in this unfamiliar interviewing style before organising FTF interview two months later. Completed surveys were received throughout the eight-month time-period.

In this section, I discuss the theoretical influence of the active interview approach, the design of a theme list and the facilitation of pilot interviews. I then outline in detail the three methods selected for generating participants' accounts of the workplace—the online methods of web-based surveys and online interviews, and the off-line method of FTF interviews.

Table 2

Number of young people participating in each of the three methods and description of each method

Method	Number of participants for each method	Description of each method
1) Web-based survey	Twelve (12) ¹	Online method—Series of open-ended questions posted on the research website in a survey format.
2) Online interviews	Thirteen (13)	Online method—Interviews conducted in real-time through the Instant Messaging (IM) program MSN Messenger.
3) Face-to-face interviews	Thirteen (13)	Off-line method—Interviews conducted in person between the researcher and participants.

¹Four (4) young people initially sent in responses through web-based surveys then agreed to participate in a subsequent online interview to discuss their responses in greater depth.

Approach to interviewing

I adhered to an active interviewing approach for generating comprehensive accounts of young people's work experiences during both online and FTF interviews. This approach bears similarity to other interviewing approaches discussed as 'in-depth', 'unstructured' or 'focused' in which the interview is conversational in tone, not bound by a set structure, centres on the interviewee's understandings of social reality, and is generally guided by their telling of the story (Alston & Bowles 1998, p. 120; Liamputtong & Ezzy 2005, p. 56). Holstein and Gubrium (1995, p. 4) describe the active interview approach as a social encounter. The active interview is a mutually generative process of interpretation and interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee (Holstein & Gubrium 1995, p. 16). This approach is congruent with a constructivist paradigm as recognition is given to the interview as a co-generative process in which boundaries between the researcher and the researched are more permeable than prescribed in conventional interviewing roles.

Qualitative interviewers in the interpretative tradition appreciate that the interview is not a neutral tool for documenting people's stories but an active engagement of storytelling between two or more people within a specific social context (Fontana & Frey 2003, p. 62). From this perspective, participants are no longer objectively viewed as 'repositories of knowledge' (Holstein & Gubrium 1995, p. 4). As Stein (1997, p. 72) stipulates, every interview is a social interaction in which interviewers and participants alike draw on broader social and cultural practices and discourse throughout the interview. The active interview approach is not a 'biased' approach for directing the interviewee to produce particular responses. Instead, it gives the interviewer scope to explore incomplete or unarticulated areas, to suggest alternative interpretations or to make links between particular events and sequences within the interview (Holstein & Gubrium 1995, p. 17).

Young queer people are seldom given the opportunity to speak safely of their experiences as non-normative sexual subjectivities in an affirmative environment (Valentine, Butler & Skelton 2001). In selecting interview methods, I could provide young people with a politically invested audience to witness and validate their accounts of working life. I wanted young people to feel less like the sexual 'Other' in the interview context and more as mutual peers when discussing their personal accounts. An

active interview approach met these considerations. This more informal style was an effective way of generating in-depth interview accounts in a validating manner that focused on young people's interpretations of work-life without pushing a more structured agenda. This approach allowed me to explore participants' interpretations of events through further questioning and conversation while continuing to value the participant as 'the expert' on their life-experiences.

Preparing a theme list

I referred to a theme list during both FTF and online interviews. Open-ended questions for the web-based survey were prepared from this same list. Theme lists consist of important topics noted in brief that cue the interviewer to potential topics that are worth visiting in the interview and that relate directly to the research question (Liamputtong & Ezzy 2005, p. 62). My theme list covered topic areas that I had noted when reviewing the background literature and that included emergent issues from both pilot and consequent interviews. The list included topics such as formal and informal roles in the workplace, entering the workforce, perceptions of work cultures and environments, disclosing sexualities at work, relationships and interactions with co-workers and management members, challenges and difficulties in the workplace, and perceived advantages and disadvantages to identifying as non-heterosexual in the workplace. I also invited participants to discuss former experiences of employment, including first experiences of participation in the workplace, to be able to note changes in their patterns of work-based interaction. The theme list with sample questions is presented in Appendix D.

During the interviews, these themes were not adhered to in a strict linear format. Instead, themes were raised in varying order through asking open-ended questions to 'encourage unanticipated statements and stories to emerge' (Charmaz 2006, p. 26). Based on some of the online interviews completed and the survey responses received, I fed newly emerging topic areas into my theme list for future FTF interviews. This is in keeping with an inductive process of being attuned to new perceptions and meanings entering the interview context from participants' subjective worlds (Charmaz 2006).

A crucial component of my theme list was inviting participants to discuss how they would describe their sexuality and gender. A similar line of questioning was demonstrated by Arlene Stein (1997) when inviting lesbian-identifying women to share their narratives, or 'self-stories', of how they perceived their sexual subjectivity. I integrated questions from Stein's (1997) narrative project into my interviews, such as '*how would you describe your sexuality?*', '*what do these words mean to you?*' and '*at what point in your life did you did you come to call yourself that?*' (p. 208). I asked similar questions when inviting participants to describe their gender. This ensured that space was opened up for young people's self-stories that might have transgressed conventional understandings of sexual and gender identities. This was a particularly important question for online communication to avoid assumptions about participants' gender identity based on their provided names or described experiences.

Facilitating pilot interviews

I facilitated pilot interviews for both online and face-to-face interviews to provide an initial gauge of the interview process and to assist in 'smoothing out wrinkles', as suggested by Padgett (1998, p. 30). Pilot interviews were arranged with two volunteers who identified with the sample group but who were several years older than the specified age range. One volunteer participated in an online interview while the other person participated in a FTF interview. These 'trials' persuaded me to put aside a set of specific pre-determined questions and to adopt a more recursive style of questioning. This approach was more suitable for honouring each young person's story as a separate and unique account, and for remaining focused on and sensitive to the story being told (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell & Alexander 1991, p. 112). It was also more in keeping with the active interview approach.

Online methods of data generation**Justification for online research methods**

I predicted that by selecting online methods this would expand opportunities for young people to participate through an alternative point of access to the research. Accessing the Internet is a regular leisure activity for many young Australians. Internet access for this age group has dramatically increased over the last six years from 58% of young people (aged 18 to 24) in 1998 to 85% in 2005–06 (ABS 2005/06 cat. no. 8146.0). Furthermore, computer mediated communication (CMC) is a useful medium for accessing ‘hard to reach’ populations who are not readily visible in the public arena (Mann & Stewart 2000, p. 18). This is particularly pertinent to young queer people who may not publicly identify as non-heterosexual. Prior studies indicate that the Internet is a prominent technology in the social and sexual lives of young queer people in Australia (Hillier & Harrison 2007; Hillier, Kurdas & Horsley 2001).

CMC can offer a greater assurance of anonymity to online participants who are not required to be visible or speak directly to the researcher. Online methods provide the space to construct an online persona that is preferable to the participant in regards to self-presentation (Markham 2005, p. 809; McCoyd 2006). Mann & Stewart (2002, p. 608) argue that the Internet provides an expansive electronic field for qualitative researchers seeking to access dispersed populations. Online methods enabled me to access a diverse sample that was geographically spread across Australian cities and regional centres. Ordinarily, I would not have been able to fund or resource this required level of travel for FTF methods. However, using online methods does place greater responsibility on the researcher for setting clear boundaries for their inquiry. As Markham (2005) reiterates, “boundaries are not so much determined by ‘location’ as they are by ‘interaction’” (p. 801). In my study, the criteria for participation were clearly defined on the research website.

First method: Web-based surveys

I designed an alternative option for online participation through a web-based survey in recognition that not all young people would wish to commit to the more time-intensive process of online or FTF interviewing. Twelve (12) participants participated through this method; four (4) of these young people later agreed to participate in an online interview. Web-based surveys are similar in format and appearance to hand-written surveys except uploaded online and translated into HTML (hypertext mark-up language) as a standard language protocol used across Internet browsers (Rhodes, Bowie & Hergenrather 2003, p. 68). These surveys can be an attractive and straightforward option for participation in research while simultaneously providing researchers with a consistent format of data through which to compare and consider response-sets (Mann & Stewart 2002, p. 612).

I decided to use web-based surveys because this method provided a private, flexible and autonomous means for young queer people to participate. Online participation enhances participant autonomy and ensures a high degree of flexibility and control for users in when, where and for how long they participate in the research (Mann & Stewart 2000, p. 24; Mustanski 2001). Survey participants are free to participate in their own time without feeling pressured to respond to interview-based questions in a more intrusive discussion in 'real-time' (Rhodes et al 2003).

The survey process

The web-based survey was uploaded as one of the three options for participation available on the research website. Participants were provided with a text-box layout under each question to compose their responses. These text boxes expanded to accommodate longer responses. After completing the survey and pressing 'SEND', the completed responses were automatically sent to my email inbox. Drop-down menus with fixed-responses were used to gather basic demographic information including current age (range 16-26 years), current location of workplace ('rural', 'regional' or 'urban') and home state/territory location. These demographic questions were included across all three methods of data generation for consistency. Please see the attached CD-ROM to view the online survey format as part of the research website—click on 'Send in your

story via email' on the website homepage. A standardised sequence of open-ended questions were composed and uploaded on the webpage. These questions were based on the interview theme list and focused on general experiences of workplaces (*how would you describe the places where you work/ have worked?*) through to more specific questions exploring relationships with co-workers and other staff (*who in your workplace/s might you talk to about sex and sexualities?* and *how would you select that person/s?*). I limited the number of questions to no more than eleven to prevent young people feeling fatigued from having to complete a long-winded survey, as suggested by Riggle et al (2005, p. 4).

Challenges in using web-based surveys

This method of self-completion relied entirely on how much information participants chose to convey. In some cases, very short and occasionally ambiguous statements were provided which were difficult to interpret. This could be explained through varying levels of literacy and typing skills or through the limitations on how much time participants had access to computers, particularly if accessed in public spaces (Riggle et al 2005). I overcame this difficulty by inviting email respondents to provide me with their email address at the end of the survey if they agreed to further contact. This gave me the opportunity to acknowledge their responses and to email back additional clarifying or probing questions based on their original responses. The majority of participants were willing to respond to two or three further questions. In addition, I had to make certain that I wrote in plain language at all times as ambiguous expressions can often lead to the misinterpretation of intended meaning. One other challenge was the restriction on interaction between the researcher and participants. While standardised web-based surveys can restrict participants from engaging directly with the researcher, online interviews open the space for dialogue in real-time (James & Busher 2006).

Second method: Online interviews

The second method of online participation was through online interviews using the instant messaging program MSN Messenger (Microsoft 2005). Thirteen (13) young people participated through this method. Instant messaging (IM), otherwise known as 'real-time chat', involves the synchronous exchange of messages between two or more users simultaneously from different computer terminals (Mann & Stewart 2002, p. 604). MSN differs from other chat rooms available on the Internet in which groups meet online for text-based discussion. In contrast, IM is a private program in which individual users are required to have other MSN users saved in their 'contacts' list before chat sequences can be initiated. This makes IM ideal for one-to-one research interviews in a private electronic setting (Robinson 2001). For my project, Microsoft Messenger was selected as a well-established and highly accessible IM program that was available to download free from the Microsoft website. Consequentially, MSN proved to be a familiar and user-friendly tool for online participation.

I selected this method because it was a highly accessible means of exchanging open and reflective dialogue with young people about their experiences of the workplace. I considered that some young people might be more encouraged to participate if they did not have to meet with the researcher in person and could participate from the comfort of their preferred surroundings. This method ensured a considerable degree of anonymity and control over personal information. Similar to web-based surveys, participants have a high level of autonomy within online interviews as they can swiftly exit the interview setting with one click of a mouse button (Mann & Stewart 2000, p. 56). IM also provides both researcher and participants with time for reflecting on their responses (Bowker & Tiffin 2004, p. 231). Furthermore, online participants may feel greater comfort in disclosing their life-stories without having to engage with the physical presence of the researcher (Bowker & Tiffin 2004, p. 231).

The online interview process

I facilitated online discussions with participants located across the Australian mainland through MSN. Markham (1998, p. 64) advises that substantial time-periods should be anticipated for engaging with people online. This advice proved invaluable as most of the online meetings lasted from two to four hours with the majority of participants meeting with me at least twice. It became rapidly clear that online interviewing was a considerably slower and more laborious method than FTF interviewing that could occur anytime, day or night. As most online interviews were spread across several meetings, many participants wanted to continue chatting the next consecutive day. This presented a challenge for me in making certain that I was always available and poised at my keyboard. However, it was also a blessing to continue discussions that were relatively fresh in both our minds.

Challenges in facilitating online interviews

The process of online interviewing brought its own set of challenges. Technical difficulties with MSN and online access presented occasional challenges such as not being able to log on to MSN when the program was inundated with other users. I remedied this by making sure I logged on to MSN at least half an hour before the arranged meeting time. Another challenge I encountered with using MSN were the limitations placed on the amount of text that could be written per response. The text boxes in MSN only allowed each user to compose several lines of text before having to press 'Enter' and display their message to the other user. I wondered whether this limit on text would deter participants from elaborating on their responses. Instead, this often produced a series of short responses that were spread down the page. These responses were far more succinct, precise and less 'wordy' than responses generated in FTF interviews but were nonetheless thick in description and detail. Sometimes it took me several attempts to interpret abbreviated forms of 'text-speech' such as '*ppl*' ('people') or '*btw*' ('by the way'). However, if ever unclear I had plenty of opportunities to seek clarification while frequently posing as an MSN 'dim-wit'. After the first few interviews I quickly became adept in using what Mann and Stewart refer to as 'electronic

paralanguage' (2000, p. 134). Appendix E contains two extracts from online interviews to illustrate the appearance and layout of 'text-speech' in MSN.

It was not always easy to establish rapport with participants through text-based communication, particularly with the absence of non-verbal cues (McCoyd & Kerson 2006, p. 396). I used several techniques to maintain rapport that I had learnt from my initial few interviewees. Both participants and I used emoticons as a way of injecting warmth and a more humanistic quality into our online interactions, for instance :O) for smiling/happy or :-O for shock/surprise. Other abbreviations such as 'lol' ('laughing out loud') and 'OMG' ('oh my God!') were also useful in what Mann and Stewart (2002, p. 614) refer to as 'linguistic conventions'. These conventions assisted in sustaining emotional connections and signalling our activities, such as 'brb' ('be right back'), when we both required short breaks. Silence is not useful in real-time chat because it can be easily misinterpreted as absence. Therefore, I regularly included attending signals such as 'yep', 'ok', 'sure' and 'go on' to encourage participants to continue their responses and to reiterate my active interest, as suggested by Mann & Stewart (2002, p. 618).

Off-line methods of data generation

Third method: Face-to-face interviews

The third method of data generation in my research consisted of interviews with young people face-to-face (FTF). While the two online methods produced briefer and more concise accounts, FTF interviews generated more discursive and detailed stories that enhanced the overall depth of the data. Thirteen (13) young people participated through this method. This method was chiefly restricted to young people residing in Tasmania with one exception; a young person located in a different state who did not feel confident in using MSN for an online interview and preferred to meet over telephone.

The FTF interview process

Interviews were conducted in private and comfortable settings such as in office spaces on-campus or at participants' homes at their invitation. Two interviews were conducted by telephone at the request of two (2) participants due to geographical distance. In regards to the sequencing of interviews, straightforward demographic questions, as outlined in the web-based survey, were first asked to help 'break the ice' before engaging in a more detailed discussion. To initiate each discussion I invited each young person to consider '*What's it like being not straight in your workplace?*' Centering on participants' current workplaces provided a more familiar set of responses for participants to begin with before having to recall specific experiences from their work history. Please see the ordering of interview themes in Appendix D.

The period of engagement with each young person varied and was often determined by the length of each young person's account. The majority of FTF interviews ran for approximately ninety minutes. In many cases, this felt sufficient in generating detailed accounts that moved beyond surface description to canvassing participants' interpretations of events. Several interviews ran over two meetings where we both agreed that more time was required to continue our discussion. Each FTF interview was recorded on a digital recorder; this was useful in being able to record long interview sequences without the hassle of changing cassettes. I later transcribed interview recordings into Word documents for analysis.

Ethical considerations in the data generation process

Social work researchers are committed to the research principle of non-maleficence or 'doing no harm' to participants (Alston & Bowles 1998, p. 21). Therefore, it was vital that I considered the ethical implications of young people's participation both on and off-line. Institutional ethics approval for this research was obtained from the Tasmanian Social Sciences Human Ethics Research Committee (University of Tasmania). In addition, the Victorian AIDS Council required submission of a similar application through their own ethics committee before they agreed to send out research

advertisements to their younger client-base. In this discussion, I focus on procedural issues relating specifically to the sample group and to conducting research online.

Reaching out to young queer people in a safe manner

Young queer people are a potentially difficult population to reach because many young people become adept at hiding their sexuality from visibility and identification, as discussed in Chapter Two. Similarly, not all young queer people publicly identify as non-heterosexual or feel that they are safely able to because of the surrounding pressures of heteronormative expectations and the threat of homonegative abuse. Alternatively, some young queer people may not associate their lives with popular identity labels, such as lesbian and gay (Savin-Williams 2005). It is essential for researchers to recognise the social stigma attached to 'non-hetero' sexualities and arising issues for research participants such as concerns of being 'outed' through participation (Elze 2003; Hillier & Mitchell 2004; Hillier et al 2007; Valentine et al 2001). Hence, ethical requirements of confidentiality, anonymity and autonomy are exceedingly important when inviting young queer people to participate in research. Hillier et al (2005, p. 6) argue that young people need to be in control of their participation to ensure the process is as safe as possible and to prevent unintended disclosure. In this project, the use of online methods provided a high level of control and autonomy in the research process for young queer people.

While institutional settings such as schools provide 'captive' youth populations for research, other researchers point to the danger of seeking participants through school settings and potentially identifying queer students to their peers (Hillier et al 2007, p. 127; Valentine et al 2001, p. 121). On reflection, I made a similar decision not to approach specific workplaces or work-related networks when inviting young people to participate. I did not wish unintentionally to identify young queer employees to other staff, or place young people at any risk of being 'outed' as a consequence of participating in the research. In short, I did not want to compromise their employment in any way.

A further ethical consideration in relation to participants' safety was the issue of informed consent. It is a conventional ethical requirement that young people under eighteen require parental or guardian consent for participation as 'vulnerable populations' (Padgett 1998, p. 36). This is a standard requirement from the 'National statement of ethical conduct in research involving humans' in Australia (National Health and Medical Research Council 2007, Section 4.2). When seeking young queer people under the age of eighteen to participate I did not want to place unnecessary pressure on potential participants to obtain parental consent. From their most recent national survey of same-sex attracted youth, Hillier et al (2005) report that it is rare for young queer people to disclose their sexuality to their parents first. Bearing this in mind, these researchers argued that seeking parental consent for participation was an inappropriate requirement to place on the shoulders of young queer people (Hillier et al 2005). This precedent proved invaluable for me when putting forward an argument to the university ethics committee for young people aged sixteen to seventeen to be exempt from seeking parental consent. This argument was accepted.

Confidentiality and anonymity

During the data generation process, I applied the following measures to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of participants on and off-line:

- Clearly explained to each participant both verbally and in writing the limits of confidentiality and anonymity and any potential risks identified in participating (Appendix F contains the project's Information Sheet and Consent Form);
- Invited participants to elect a pseudonym that would be used in the reporting of their experiences;
- Completed all interview transcriptions myself in a private office-space;
- Extracted identifying information from participants' transcripts, including names of people, employers and places;

- Reported participants' workplaces by broad reference to particular industries or work settings rather than detailed descriptions of their employers;
- Stored all audio, digital and written data in a private and secure location on-campus;
- Collapsed the data into themes and sub-themes when reporting the findings, and omitted potentially identifying quotations and stories in the data.

In addition, I sent interview transcriptions and survey responses back to participants and invited them to make any further 'identifying' edits. This was to ensure that they were satisfied with this process and that the transcriptions had their approval. Several young people requested me to 'name' their former workplaces in the transcriptions and later findings. This was chiefly in relation to large retail corporations where young people had recalled distressing or exploitative conditions and sought some kind of retribution through 'naming'. After some consideration, I decided to go against their requests in accordance with University of Tasmania's ethical requirements and because of my concerns that: a) there is no way of predicting how this information would be received by others, for example by the employers named, and what ensuing legal or procedural action could arise; and b) once findings had been presented or published there would be little scope for participants to later retract their initial request.

Online communication can present additional challenges in maintaining confidentiality. With regards to surveys received through email, unwelcome visitors can potentially hack into listservers if emails are left online over a period of time or when stored on a shared computer (McAuliffe 2003; Riggle et al 2005). I forewarned participants of this risk in the project Information Sheet. Following guidelines established by McCoyd and Carson (2006), I checked my email inbox daily, copied each completed survey to a Word file, stored these files on a removable thumb-drive, and deleted original emails from my online account. Likewise, online interviews through MSN were 'cut and pasted' to a privately-saved Word file immediately after each interview to guarantee that other computer users on campus did not have access to these conversations. Whenever possible I arranged to participate in online interviews from my private computer at home.

Authenticity online

From initial contact with young people online, I grappled with the issue of authenticity. Authenticity is a pertinent issue that has been frequently noted in discussions of online methods, raising questions as to how researchers ensure that online participants are who they claim to be and remove the possibility of 'online deception' (Binik, Mah & Kiesler 1999; Flicker, Hanns & Skinner 2004; Mann & Stewart 2000, p. 211; Markham 2005, p. 808). Suggested measures include requesting proof of identity to verify participants' identities or asking similar questions across multiple formats to ensure consistent, and supposedly reliable, responses (Flicker et al 2004). As the researcher, I did not have the legal authority to request formal identification and neither did I wish to make such a militant request that would have compromised anonymity as an ethical strategy. These kinds of 'reality checks' could be experienced as alienating for some participants (Mann & Stewart 2000, p. 214). It could be argued that the 'risk' of deception is a potential problem in many research methods including surveying, telephone interviewing and FTF interviews. There is always the possibility of embellishment and poetic licence in the recounting of personal experiences (Mann & Stewart 2000, p. 212). From a constructivist standpoint, the significant factor is participants' conveyance of their meaning-making and not the objective truth of their accounts.

Nevertheless, to minimise concerns about participant 'fraud' I accounted for three factors in the research design. First, the recruitment sources selected for distributing advertisements were youth-based and in general focused on sexuality-related issues. This helped to alleviate the risk of deception from Internet users 'external' to these networks and sites. Second, I sustained a period of prolonged engagement with the majority of online participants through continuous emails or across several meetings online. This assisted in building consistent and credible interview accounts, as suggested by Padgett (1998, p. 98). Third, convergent themes were noted from young people's accounts across FTF and online interviews; this enhanced the trustworthiness of stories generated through online methods.

Seeking informed consent online

Verifying participants' identities raises further concerns regarding how informed consent is obtained from online participants as indications that they fully comprehend what is required in participating (Rhodes et al 2003). This ethical requirement is not as easily met with online participants without the use of conventional indications of consent such as the written signature. Using consent forms presented another complication when one of the advantages of online methods is that participants are not obliged to disclose any identifying information. It was relatively simple to provide detailed information about the project by uploading these details on the research website and expressing these details in plain language, as proposed by Liangputtong & Ezzy (2005, p. 242). Based on Mann and Stewart's (2000, p. 49) recommendations, I placed a consent form as a Word attachment on the website and instructed participants that this form had to be initialised and emailed to me before we could meet in a formal online interview. Instead of providing first names I encouraged young people to write their initials and title the subject of their email as 'I agree' to indicate their consent. For the web-based surveys, consent was automatically implied once participants had pressed 'SEND'. This waved the requirement for participants to email in consent forms.

Providing support to young people online

Qualitative interviewing can sometimes lead to the retelling of painful life events that may be distressing for some participants. This requires appropriate support responses (Padgett 1998, p. 36). Within online interviews, there are limitations on the level of support that interviewers can provide (McCoyd & Kerson 2006). This is especially so when not being able to see or hear participants' personal distress or discomfort. The majority of the time I was limited to relying on minimal responses of 'Feeling ok' or 'Yep, I'm fine' as superficial indications of participants' wellbeing. In recognition of these limitations, I uploaded a webpage of queer and youth-related support services on the research website to direct participants to if seeking additional support. Please view this webpage on the attached CD-ROM. During each interview, I encouraged each person to signal if wanting to halt the interview. I also contracted with each participant to

have post-interview contact through email as a way of debriefing after each interview and for sharing any further thoughts or recollections.

Data analysis methods

My approach to the analysis of data was influenced by two complementary methods: thematic analysis and constructivist grounded theory. In this section, I outline these two methods and elaborate on my approach to coding. When initially reviewing different methods of data analysis I considered applying a narrative analysis approach. Narrative analysis focuses on complete stories as units of analysis (Riessman 1993, p. 1). While the majority of face-to-face interview data was expressed in narrative form, it would have been difficult to apply a narrative framework to the more stilted and succinct responses generated through online methods. Therefore, I considered that applying a constructivist grounded theory approach to coding was a more effective form of analysis that encompassed the whole data set.

The process of analysis was aided by *NVivo7* (QSR 2006), a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis system (CAQDAS). Computer-assisted systems have proven useful in overcoming the physical limitations of relying on paper records in analysis and in providing a more efficient way of organising and coding data that makes it easier to detail the steps involved in formulating findings (Marshall 2002; Wickham & Woods 2005). Software programs, such as *NVivo7*, are an electronic aid for organising and sorting data only; these programs are not intended to replace or to impair the creativity of the researcher engaged in interpretative practice (Marshall 2002). In this research, each completed survey, online and FTF transcript were imported into *NVivo7* for analysis after the transcript had received approval from participants.

First method: Thematic analysis

My analytical approach resembled a more general thematic analysis. This method requires repeated reading through the data line by line, the noting of emergent themes, or clusters of shared ideas, and the development of thematic codes (Liamputtong & Ezzy 2005, p. 336). Themes expand across multiple data sets and convey patterns in human experiences and meaning-making (Padgett 1998, p. 83). Thematic analysis is an inductive approach that is in many ways similar to grounded theory by seeking to build concepts and theories from the data itself. Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005, p. 265) note that the major difference between the two methods is that grounded theory typically involves theoretical sampling by returning to the field of research to generate further data throughout the analysis process whereas thematic analysis does not. In this sense, my approach was closer to thematic analysis than grounded theory, as it was less cyclical and more unidirectional in moving from data generation to analysis.

Second method: Constructivist grounded theory

The constructivist grounded theory method provided a transparent and rigorous process for coding the data. Constructivist grounded theory reclaims the original coding processes of grounded theory. This method applies these original techniques in a more open-ended and flexible approach that acknowledges the subjective presence of the researcher (Charmaz 2000, p. 510). Grounded theory is traditionally a methodological framework for inquiry as well as a procedure for analysis. The grounded theory methods originally developed by sociologists Glaser and Strauss (1967), and later Strauss & Corbin (1990), were founded on a positivist paradigm. The researcher was situated in the role of the neutral observer who discovers, interprets and collapses the data through a standardised set of coding procedures. The aim was to produce objective theoretical statements about the data (Charmaz 2000, p. 510).

In constructivist grounded theory, much greater emphasis is given to the researcher who constructs the conceptual framework through their subjective gaze (Charmaz 2000, p.

522). The constructivist approach does not seek an objective claim to Truth. The researcher is more concerned with the lived realities of participants, focusing on ‘worlds made real in the minds and through the words and actions of its members’ (Charmaz 2000, p. 523). Attention is directed at the reflexive generation of data through the engagement between the researcher and the participants while the aim in data analysis is the development of generic concepts that are always tentative and conditional and never conclusive or generalisable (Charmaz 2000 p. 524). The strength of this method is through its provision of clear guidelines and strategies for building analytic frameworks (Charmaz 2000, p. 511). At the same time, it allows for flexible coding techniques that are open to variation and creative engagement with the data.

In my analysis of the data, I applied the flexible coding processes outlined by Charmaz (2006). I adopted this approach because it provided me with a set of explicit yet flexible coding techniques for interpreting the data in a systematic manner that was compatible with a constructivist methodology. In addition, this approach appealed to me because of its compatibility with critical social work and the pursuit of a transformative agenda. The researcher can intentionally focus the data generation process to examine specific questions of social inequality, justice and fairness. This gives permission for the researcher to take a critical stance in relation to social hierarchies, power relations, ideologies and institutional arrangements evident in the data (Charmaz 2005, p. 512). In my research, critical concepts, such as homonegativity and heteronormativity, did not necessarily drive the analysis but instead acted as sensitising concepts throughout the coding process.

The coding process

Coding is a process of selecting, separating and categorising data into specific constructs that moves statements into initial interpretations. The aim of coding is to ‘remain open to exploring whatever theoretical possibilities’ can be discerned from the data (Charmaz 2006, p. 47). Codes are intended to ‘crystallise’ participants’ experiences (Charmaz 2006, p. 54). The flexible coding techniques that I applied from the constructivist grounded theory method were i) initial coding, ii) focused and axial coding, and iv) theoretical

coding alongside the continuous process of v) memoing. In following these techniques, I generated over two-thousand ‘nodes’ (2,250 in total) or categories of data with the aid of *NVivo7*.

1) Initial coding

Initial coding is intended to be tentative and closely ‘grounded’ in the data (Charmaz 2006, p. 43). In my analysis, this phase consisted of meticulously reading each transcript and generating open codes that emerged from the data on an incident-by-incident basis. I defined each incident as chunks of sequences that encapsulated an encounter, story, description or reflection of events from each participant’s account. I labelled each code based on particular perceptions, beliefs, descriptions or reactions conveyed in participants’ statements or alternatively created ‘in vivo’ codes by adhering to the original words of the participants. This helped preserve symbolic words or expressions such as ‘It’s a *good place* to work’, as suggested by Charmaz (2006, p. 55). After meticulously reviewing each transcript, I compared the constructed list of open codes and merged similar or repetitive codes to create more robust codes. As open codes with similar themes began to emerge, I grouped these codes into what *NVivo7* refers to as ‘tree nodes’. This enabled me to see the emergent patterns and reoccurrences in the data both within each participant’s account and across their accounts and assisted in organising the data more systematically. Please see Table 3 for an example of a tree node and its accompanying nodes.

Table 3

Tree node and accompanying nodes outlining the ways young people spoke about resigning in their accounts of the workplace

Tree node (thematic category)	Accompanying nodes (sub-categories)
Choosing to resign from work	<i>Choosing to walk out of work</i> <i>Dreading work—choosing to resign</i> <i>Feeling relieved but guilty</i> <i>Leaving and no longer caring</i> <i>Leaving because of stress</i> <i>Not staying in a homophobic workplace</i> <i>Quitting as exercising my choice</i> <i>Quitting work as stressful</i> <i>Quitting work for healthier life</i> <i>Walking out</i>

2) Focused and axial coding

Focused coding was a useful technique for comparing thematic categories and noting significant or ‘full’ categories that were emerging. I applied these emergent categories as filters for focusing my reading of the data. From this process I was able to expand these more prominent codes with additional data or decide that these categories represented stand-alone clusters that were not substantiated through other interview accounts, as advised by Charmaz (2006, p. 57).

Charmaz (2006, p. 60) describes axial coding as a technique for re-sorting formulated codes and categories into core categories and sub-categories. The aim is to develop layers within each core category that move from descriptive to conceptual relationships. In my analysis, axial coding was a process of refining the nodes I had attached to broader tree nodes through merging and collapsing sub-categories to flesh out fuller dimensions to each tree node. This also involved building in additional tree nodes within core tree nodes so that each core category began to tell its own multi-dimensional story.

For instance, with the core category of ‘Children, youth and sexuality’ I read across each related participants’ account and the generated open codes and gathered corresponding data similar to the process of focused coding. My next task was to then examine the sub-categories within each core category and develop the emerging relationships between these sub-categories. Two sub-categories were developed: one containing young workers’ encounters with homonegative responses elicited by children and the other containing participants’ fears and anxieties of parents voicing concerns that their children were ‘at risk’. When combined, these two sub-categories began to tell a story of how working with children governed and silenced young workers’ expressions of sexuality and intimacy in the workplace. This example is depicted in Table 4.

Table 4

Example of a core category, its two subsequently developed sub-categories and descriptions for each sub-category

Core category	Sub-categories	Description of sub-categories
'Children, youth and sexuality'	<i>a) Homonegative responses from children</i>	Young people's encounters with homonegative comments spoken by children in the course of working with this age group; includes name-calling, laughing and ridiculing comments directed at queer sexualities
	<i>b) Fears and anxieties of homophobic responses from parents</i>	Instances of young people voicing their concerns for parents' homophobic responses to queer employees working directly with their children

3) Theoretical coding

Charmaz (2006) describes theoretical coding as the final phase of developing each core category from description to telling an ‘analytical story in a theoretical direction’ (p. 63). As I refined each core category and developed the relationships between its sub-categories a more nuanced story grew from each core theme. I then began to cement the core themes by ensuring that one category did not contradict or overlap with another or, if it did, reflecting on how these concepts differed in regards to workplace context or other variances in the data. The process of writing was integral to theoretical coding. Writing about each core category assisted in clarifying the kind of story each thematic category was conveying. In the iterative process of writing (and rewriting) thick descriptions about the findings, the theoretical implications of the data took shape. I began to organise code categories into a theoretical account that cemented links between, and highlighted divergences from, the literature. Table 5 presents the final seven core themes and their related sub-themes developed through these coding techniques.

Table 5

Presentation of the seven core themes and related sub-themes developed through the four techniques of coding

Core themes	Sub-themes
Core theme one: Practices of sexual exclusion in the workplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Symbolic practices of exclusion ii) Material violence in the workplace iii) Discrimination in the workplace iv) The injurious effects of working in sexually exclusive workplaces
Core theme two: Resisting and refuting exclusionary practices in the workplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Vacating exclusionary spaces ii) Dismissing and questioning homonegative beliefs iii) Taking action through informal and formal strategies iv) Educating others within censored boundaries
Core theme three: The workplace as a regulatory space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) The imperative to sustain invisibility in the workplace ii) First process of bodywork: Monitoring and modifying speech and communication iii) Second process of bodywork: 'Playing it straight' iv) Third process of bodywork: The selective use of silence v) Resisting processes of bodywork
Core theme four: The workplace as a silencing space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Silence as an intimately shared state ii) Silence as an ambiguous state iii) Silence as an inescapable state
Core theme five: Managing the unmanageable—sexual disclosure in the workplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) The 'coming out' imperative ii) Doing disclosure in the workplace iii) Responses to disclosure: an unpredictable process iv) The (in)convenience of workplace gossip

Core theme six: The workplace as an inclusive space	<ul style="list-style-type: none">i) The symbolism of supportive relationshipsii) Micro-practices of inclusioniii) Participating in inclusive work culturesiv) The insignificance of workplace policy and procedure
Core theme seven: The workplace as a sexually diverse space	<ul style="list-style-type: none">i) Connecting with queer colleaguesii) Differences and divisions between queer colleaguesiii) Experiences of inclusion and exclusion within queer-majority workplaces

4) Memo writing

The continual process of memo writing assisted me with formulating focused and theoretical codes throughout the analytical process. Memos are the building blocks for conceptualising the data that enable researchers to write creatively about their codes while building their interpretations (Charmaz 2000, p. 517). I continually jotted down my thoughts in a journal during the data generation phase so I could keep track of early interpretations. At the same time, *NVivo7* facilitated the creation and storage of over twenty-seven (27) memos throughout the coding process. When consolidating or expanding sub-categories, I used my memos to begin connecting these budding themes with threads from the literature. This process of continual writing made me consider the kinds of stories that were conveyed within these codes and their significance in speaking back to the research question and aims.

Issues of reflexivity and trustworthiness

Qualitative research is a process of active engagement with participants. Accordingly, it is a process heavily influenced by the subjective presence of the researcher (Sword 1999). This discussion touches on my considerations of reflexivity and the shaping of the research process through my active presence as the ‘instrument of the research’ (Liamputtong & Ezzy 2005, p. 43). This level of self-reflection is a fundamental process for enhancing the trustworthiness of my findings and making transparent the ways in which I connected with the participants. By the term trustworthy, I mean a research account that is credible, recognisable and meaningful to the ‘constructors of the original multiple realities’, the participants, as well as appearing as a credible and reasonable narrative to other audiences (Lincoln & Guba 1985, p. 296). I elaborate on procedures for enhancing trustworthiness in the latter half of this discussion.

Fook (1999) defines reflexivity as the capacity for the researcher to locate their presence in the research and to recognize in a transparent manner how they may shape the process of knowledge production:

It is an ability to locate yourself in the picture, to understand, and factor in, how what you see is influenced by your own way of seeing, and how your very presence and act of research influences the situation in which you are researching (p. 12).

A reflexive position shies away from the objectivist stance of seeking to minimise researcher bias or intrusion. Alternatively, the subjective presence of the researcher and shared interactions between the researcher and the participants can enhance the research process by collaboratively generating mutually meaningful data (Fook 1999, p. 14).

In this study, I sat in a parallel world to the young people I was ‘researching’: as a young person who self-identifies as ‘queer’, and as a non-heterosexual ‘worker’ who had been employed in several workplaces across my work history. In this sense, I was accredited with what is referred to as ‘category entitlement’, simultaneously identifying with constructs such as ‘queer’ and ‘youth’ and treading a similar life-journey to the young people’s lives I was researching (Abell, Locke, Condor, Gibson & Stevenson 2006). To make this transparent to participants I intentionally signalled to each person that I identified as ‘queer’. I also described how my interest in this topic had arisen from personal experiences. I uploaded this information onto the research website, titled ‘Meet the Researcher’; please see the attached CD-ROM to view this webpage. This level of transparency may have resonated with some participants and assisted with building rapport through a basis of shared understanding. Kong et al (2002, p. 252) argue that it is the responsibility of the ‘ethical researcher’ to ensure that their personal investment in the research is always transparent. This is important for building trust and cooperation in the research relationship.

At various points during interviews, I continued to connect with participants as two young people who shared some basis of commonality. I sought to do this through

moments of impromptu self-disclosure whereby I shared dimensions of my work history that resonated with participants' stories or alternatively, offered my own reflections on similar experiences under discussion. However, I was also cautious in not wanting to break focus from participants' accounts or interrupt their storytelling; sometimes this was a hard process to gauge but also a forgiving process. My reasoning behind these actions was founded on discussions of self-disclosure in interview settings as an effective way of encouraging mutual reciprocity and trust (Johnson 2002, p. 190). It is argued that self-disclosure can provide a means of addressing inequitable power relations between the researcher and the researched by breaking down hierarchies in research relationships (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen & Liamputtong 2007).

Postmodern critiques of identity present new challenges to researchers in attempting to use self-disclosure in research interviews. The post-modern subject is non-unitary in identity and conversely fragmented across multiple subjectivities. Each individual is separately located within a limited range of subject positions across social differences such as gender, class, race and sexuality (Kong et al 2002, p. 244). In other words, the different subject positions we are located in determine how we may experience similar contexts or shared settings in variant ways. As a researcher undertaking postgraduate studies within an academic institution, I was situated in a reality far-removed from the lives of many other young queer people working in Australia. Despite points of commonality shared with participants, I was still the researcher positioned in an authoritative role over the research process. Consequently, I had the final say in how participants' accounts were represented in text, as discussed by Richardson (1990, p. 12). In this sense, I was situated in a more powerful position in a distinctly unequal relationship. In reflecting on my social background, I was also located within a position of white, middle-class male privilege. These differences imply a vast expanse between my experiences and the experiences of other young people, for example, young queer women, in the workplace. This may have had a determining effect on how I represented, or potentially misrepresented, the accounts of others in my analysis as I interpreted the data through a subjective and situated lens.

Ultimately, these differences in power and roles within research can only be rectified by applying a completely different methodology, such as a collaborative or participatory action framework (see, for example, Lather & Smithies 1997). However, there were

procedural measures I could apply in opening up my findings to multiple viewpoints and to contestation. These were processes for enhancing what Lincoln and Guba (1985) discuss as ‘trustworthiness’ in the research findings. First, I frequently consulted with my three supervisors about my interpretations of the data through discussion and through submitting my findings for their perusal. This panel of academics gave me a soundboard to validate as well as question my interpretations, and they frequently invited me into viewing my data from different angles and standpoints.

Second, I presented my findings to different audiences throughout my candidature. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 308) argue that presenting one’s findings to a critical audience is a valuable process for enhancing trustworthiness. I followed this process to ensure that any conceptual relationships or tentative conclusions I made appeared feasible to other people outside my point of view. I presented a series of initial findings to four contrasting audiences across various conferences and seminars: an academic audience within my faculty²; local social work practitioners and students³; a national audience of health and human service providers committed to improving queer health and wellbeing⁴; and, an international audience drawn together under the collective banner of ‘LGBT human rights’⁵.

Third, I presented my emergent findings to the participants in the research; this was a similar process to what Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 314) describe as ‘member checking’. This was to ensure that my reconstruction of participants’ stories appeared to be a fair representation of their perceptions and descriptions of events. It was also an opportunity to invite alternative interpretations of the findings from the original story-tellers. To achieve this, I shared several papers with participants that I had presented to the audiences discussed above, and invited their feedback. I either sent out papers as email attachments or as URL links to sound recordings and papers uploaded online. Participants’ responses fell into two categories—by either expressing their appreciation or by not responding at all. Some participants acknowledged my email with a quick ‘hello’ or brief appreciative comments. Several emails bounced back while no reply was

² School of Sociology and Social Work Seminar Series at UTas, August 2006

³ ‘Welfare to Work’ Tasmanian Social Work Conference, UTas, November 2006

⁴ 6th National Health in Difference Conference, Brisbane Queensland, June 2007

⁵ ‘International Conference on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Human Rights’, Outgames festival, Montreal Canada, July 2006

received from others, raising concerns over the sustainability of participant contact through email. However, this was the agreed point of contact and for the majority of online participants it was the only contact information provided. This highlights the inherent difficulties in sustaining research relationships online as ‘participants can disappear without a trace into cyberspace’ (Mann & Stewart 2002, p. 697). The appreciative responses that were received did give me a sense of confirmation that I was interpreting participants’ stories in a light which was agreeable to and affirming for some of the story-tellers.

Concluding comments to the chapter

This chapter has outlined the methodological and research design framework for this study. A qualitative approach from a constructivist standpoint was considered the most suitable methodological framework for meeting the purpose and aims of the research. A range of purposive sampling and qualitative interviewing methods were applied to seek out potential participants and to generate young people’s accounts of the workplace as queer workers. This included the online methods of web-based surveys and online interviewing, and the off-line method of face-to-face interviewing. At the heart of each of these methods was an ethical commitment to ensuring that principles of confidentiality, anonymity, informed consent and autonomy were upheld at all times, and that young queer people were supported throughout their participation. Interview accounts were analysed through the complementary methods of thematic analysis and constructivist grounded theory. Throughout the data generation and analysis process, I considered issues of reflexivity and procedural rigour for enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

This concludes the second part of this thesis and leads into the third part, the presentation of research findings. In the following three chapters, I discuss and describe in detail the seven core themes and their related sub-themes generated from this research process.

CHAPTER FIVE

Experiencing the workplace as a sexually exclusive space

Introduction to the chapter

In the previous chapter, I outlined the process of data generation and the formulation of thematic findings within a constructivist methodological framework. This chapter is the first of three findings chapters in which I present the seven core themes developed through the methods of thematic analysis and constructivist grounded theory. Each chapter presents the stories of participants that in a collective form recount an intricate story of how young people experienced the workplace as queer workers. In this chapter, I canvas the first two core themes—Table 6 provides a summary of the two core themes and respective sub-themes presented.

The purpose of this chapter is to outline how young queer people in this study experienced the workplace as a sexually exclusive space. Within this study, the workplace was experienced as an exclusive space in which young people did not always feel safe, included or valued as non-heterosexual employees. This was evident in the findings through the exclusive and violent practices exercised by other workplace actors against participants on the grounds of their sexuality. The first core theme charts how participants experienced the workplace as a site of sexual exclusion in which heterosexuality was inscribed as a normative state within these shared spaces. In this theme, I present the exclusionary encounters experienced by participants across a continuum of practices. This ranges from the symbolic expressions of exclusion felt by participants in their daily working lives through to the more overt and damaging impact of material violence and discrimination. This is followed by a snapshot of the injurious effects of participating in sexually exclusive workspaces. The second core theme focuses on the various strategies by which young queer people responded to and resisted the exclusionary practices of others, including how they refuted homonegative expressions, beliefs and stereotypes. This theme demonstrates that young people are not situated as passive victims when located in exclusionary work environments and relationships.

Instead, participants frequently deployed their own strategies of resistance against exclusionary practices, albeit within restricted boundaries.

Table 6

Summary of the two core themes and related sub-themes presented in this chapter

Core themes	Sub-themes
Core theme one: Practices of sexual exclusion in the workplace	i) Symbolic practices of exclusion ii) Material violence in the workplace iii) Discrimination in the workplace iv) The injurious effects of working in sexually exclusive workplaces
Core theme two: Resisting and refuting exclusionary practices in the workplace	i) Vacating exclusionary spaces ii) Dismissing and questioning homonegative beliefs iii) Taking action through informal and formal strategies iv) Educating others within censored boundaries

A note on the presentation of interview data

In representing the voices of participants in the following three findings chapters, I closely adhere to the words, descriptions and interpretations spoken by the young people themselves. I present two types of direct quotations. The first type is quotations from face-to-face interviews and web-based surveys in which the first name identifies the young person speaking. The names presented are pseudonyms selected by the participants. Where possible, I indicate the type of workplace to give a context to young people's statements. The second type, presented as *[Speaker's first name] says:*, denotes extracts from online interviews. To improve the readability of online text, I present the data as complete paragraphs as opposed to a series of statements spread down the page. In making this alteration, I have not changed the original expressions or statements from our online discussions. In order to preserve the language expressed by young people during online interviews, I have avoided changing the abbreviations that reflect 'text-speech'.

In the case of significant spelling and typing errors within online and email interviews, and occasionally awkward grammatical expressions within face-to-face interview transcripts, I have made some minor corrections in respect of how participants would prefer to see their accounts formally presented. Following Poland's (2002, p. 634) advice, I made these alterations on the basis that the meaning of the text was not substantially affected and only after completing the data analysis. I was motivated to make these changes after two participants expressed their embarrassment in receiving their interview transcripts and reading how their verbal responses translated into written prose. I did not anticipate this concern when initially sending back transcripts. Since then I have sought to present young people's responses in a more comprehensible and respectful light that does justice to their stories without losing the intended meaning of their words.

Core theme one: Practices of sexual exclusion in the workplace

This first core theme demonstrates the ways in which participants experienced workplaces as sexually exclusive zones through a range of symbolic and material practices. These were practices by which co-workers, managers, clients and customers alike attempted to separate queer sexualities from the established normalcy of the workplace. This in turn reinscribed the workplace as a sexually homogenous, or primarily heterosexual, space. Across their work history, the majority of participants (30) had encountered some form of exclusionary behaviour on the grounds of their sexuality. I present these exclusionary practices across three sub-themes, illustrating a continuum of violence perpetrated against queer bodies in the workplace from the covert gestures of exclusion through to the more overt expressions of material violence and discrimination. The function of these practices was to expose and separate queer subjectivities from dominant ideas of sexual normalcy, homogeneity and social convention. Within this core theme, young people rarely described their experiences as ‘homophobic’ or homophobia-related. Accordingly, I avoid using this term and instead refer to the broader concept of ‘homonegativity’ introduced in Chapter Two.

Within the data, there were numerous stories where young people described work environments in which they felt devalued, exploited, unsupported and harassed by general staff and management. This included stories of working under high stress and poor pay conditions, and feeling like a ‘disposable worker’. Participants described how these environments were endemic to the general workplace climate and were not related to their status as ‘queer’ employees. As the methodology of this thesis was centred on participants’ construction of meaning, I adhered to their interpretations of exclusionary practices on the basis of sexuality. Therefore, these other ‘oppressive’ experiences of the workplace remain a separate story to be told that is beyond the parameters of the present study.

i) Symbolic practices of exclusion

Working in what they perceived as predominantly-heterosexual workplaces, participants sometimes felt separated and disconnected from the majority of other staff. This sense of separation was not always based on direct, tangible or easily identifiable events. Young queer workers identified four distinct types of symbolic practices that held varying impacts on their emotional and psychological wellbeing. Some symbolic practices were perceived as mildly disconcerting while others were experienced as traumatic and distressing. Throughout the experience of these symbolic practices, heterosexual expressions and relationships were left undisturbed and unquestioned. Participants described a number of symbolic expressions and gestures that left them feeling uncertain as to how they were perceived by other staff and whether queer sexualities belonged in these work environments.

First type of symbolic exclusion: The subtle reinforcement of sexual norms

The first set of symbolic practices described by participants involved a set of subtle and indirect gestures and expressions, which in effect reinforced sexual and gendered norms in the workplace. These ‘normalising’ encounters consolidated the workplace as a primarily heterosexual space.

First, heterosexual norms were conveyed through the public storytelling of heterosexual exploits. The loud and exaggerated declaration of these stories in work settings reinforced young queer workers’ silence and inhibition in being able to express their own sexual stories on equal footing. Four (4) participants (Bubbles, Luke, Jack and Madeleine) described having to be unwilling audience members to the heterosexualised tales of other staff. Sometimes, within male-dominated workplaces, this was accompanied by the collective expression of homonegative sentiments. While working as kitchen-hands in the hospitality industry, both Bubbles and Luke were unwilling audiences to the heterosexual adventures and desires of their co-workers and accompanying homonegative comments. Both participants were located in male-majority environments and consequentially did not feel confident in sharing stories of their own

sexual relationships. While Bubbles normalised these stories as ‘just the usual’ banter within restaurant kitchens, at the same time she did not feel comfortable in discussing her sexual attractions within the same group:

Bubbles – ... heard a few stories I would have rather not have heard about their [male staff members] sexual adventures because when there’s like ten guys working in a kitchen all day they tend to get bored and tell stories... I don’t know [laughs], just like women they thought were hot and then slept with and trying to avoid now, and just the usual...[pause] It sort of didn’t feel comfortable, it didn’t feel comfortable joining in with their conversations but I didn’t really mind too much, it was just a bit odd.

Second, heterosexual norms were consolidated through exclusion from established group cultures in the workplace, group-cultures that appeared to be primarily *heterosexual* and *male* in membership. Four (4) young men had spoken about feeling detached from highly masculinised environments in which frequent expressions associated with hyper-masculinity, such as aggressive speech, competitive attitudes and sometimes intimidating behaviours, were collectively endorsed. This included blue-collar industries such as manufacturing and hospitality as well as white-collar industries such as corporate finance. Trent reflected on his experiences of being the ‘only gay male’ within his work-team of blokes at the chemical warehouse: ‘I have never got any bad treatment, more subtle things you notice, you’re still not “one of the boys”’. Trent elaborated on his experience of being made to feel ‘pathetic’ because of his same-sex attractions:

Trent says: Sure, as a lot of ‘straight’ guys do they will spend hours on end talking about women, you try and participate but knowing you can’t really, and eventually they will just leave you out, it’s easier for them. A female client will walk in and their jaws drop and everyone thinks they are normal but if a guy walks in and I get a twinkle in my eye, then it’s ‘pathetic’. I think although they [guys at work] don’t directly treat me bad it’s just not an even playing field...

Third, heterosexual normalcy was reinforced through visible expressions of discomfort and dismissal displayed by other staff. Three (3) participants noted how queer sexualities and same-sex relationships were visibly discomfoting topics for conversation; this heightened their sense of ill-favoured difference. Similarly, four (4) young people described incidents in which other staff members had not openly expressed homonegative sentiments however, their actions, such as ignoring queer employees, signalled exclusion. During her employment in a public library, Alex felt that she had been given ‘the cold shoulder’ and excluded from women’s conversations about weddings, a topic that she apparently ‘wouldn’t understand’. It was difficult to pinpoint whether these indirect expressions of exclusion were founded on sexuality or other social factors; as Chester states: ‘...whether that was a deliberate thing based on sexuality, it’s too difficult to tell. But it was something that made me wonder’. Nonetheless, these incidents were experienced as isolating and insensitive.

Fourth, the presumption of heterosexuality in the workplace implicitly conveyed the normative expectations of other staff members. Participants who had not spoken about their sexuality were sometimes presumed to be ‘straight’ by other staff. Four (4) young people discussed the numerous times in which both co-workers and members of management had presumed they were heterosexual or in different-sex relationships. These assumptions were frequently voiced during informal interactions such as in conversation or at social functions. For example, Maree could no longer tolerate her co-worker continually enquiring about her relationship status and seeking to set her up with a man. To end this repetitive discussion, Maree eventually told her that she was ‘gay’:

Maree – I think after the third or fourth time I said ‘I’m actually gay’ and she just said, ‘Oh I didn’t know’, and I said ‘Well that’s ok, I haven’t told you’ but I just did because it had got to the point where it was uncomfortable and I didn’t want to—Yeh, I didn’t want to be asked that anymore really.

Second type of symbolic exclusion: Sexualities under question

Six (6) young people reported being repeatedly questioned over their sexual attractions and relationships by other staff. These moments of inquisition were experienced as 'uncomfortable' or 'strange'. Participants felt displaced from the normative understandings of other employees by having their sexuality singled out and the authority to speak about their own sexual lives questioned. In this sense, questioning their sexuality was experienced as an invasive practice that effectively re-emphasised the normalcy of heterosexuality.

This is illustrated in Moskoe's story. While working at a sports store, Moskoe had faced a barrage of questions from his co-workers about his 'gay' identity. These questions signalled to Moskoe his 'abnormality' as a queer employee in a heterosexual work setting:

Moskoe – ... so they didn't understand me being gay and that, there was one guy there who was talking about it all the time, just going on about it... and I was thinking 'God, shut-up already!' But he was just someone who was just so involved in being straight, in the straight world, that he just didn't get it, so he was quizzing me a lot, which I didn't mind being quizzed. At first I was a bit upset about these jock guys that knew nothing about being gay and were just drilling me as if I was a [pause] not a freak, but just abnormal, so 'Why do this? Why do that?' things like that.

Several participants preferred to be asked directly by other staff about their sexuality rather than having their sexual lives discussed without their awareness. However, in all of these accounts participants' sexualities were approached as an object of curiosity. The kinds of questions asked chiefly centred on the intrinsic details of participants' attractions, intimate relationships and sexual experiences and were not reciprocated to other staff members, leaving heterosexual relationships undisturbed.

Third type of symbolic exclusion: The 'othering' effects of sexual humour

Participants identified humorous conversations and the exchange of jokes as a regular part of everyday work-banter. Several participants spoke of humour in the workplace as a source of stress relief and as a way of fostering good relationships between staff. However, sexualised humour that centred on queer sexualities was not always appreciated. Hearing humorous interactions in which queer sexualities were the brunt of the joke were agonising moments to have to both witness and to sometimes quietly participate in, as discussed by four (4) young people. Through this symbolic practice, queer sexualities were positioned as the sexual other.

Both Aiden and Mia had witnessed male management members openly retell sexually prejudiced jokes within their respective work-teams. Mia had witnessed her manager make a joke about people living with HIV/AIDS during the general business of a team meeting—an issue that was close to her own family life. Hearing this 'joke' signalled to Mia that this was not a safe zone to discuss her sexuality despite working in a field dedicated to health promotion:

Mia says: Another interesting thing from last week was that we had a team meeting and my manager (male, 65) made a joke about AIDS in a context of health promotion and eating etc... I was pretty hurt by this as my dad has AIDS and also I felt that these people have no idea of the things some people go through—it's not a distant thing to everyone and of course if he joked about that, what would he say about or think about me being queer.

During his employment as a waiter at a 'family-friendly' restaurant, Aiden had witnessed members of his management team joking about queer people. Similar to Mia's story, these were people in positions of organisational leadership who were initiating the exchange of homonegative humour:

Aiden – They [members of management] may make jokes about clothing, sex-acts, or would imitate sex-acts, mannerisms (stereotypical) etc... Or just display disgust. I can feel very upset about offensive language and jokes, it can make me angry, sad, depressed, bitter, feel like shit basically. Well I guess bosses are supposed to be respected, which makes that hard for one, also they can set an example for other employees (i.e. makes it ok for them to do the same).

This experience was made even more uncomfortable for some young people by having to participate in shared group laughter in which they could easily identify himself as the subject of humour, as described by Luke: ‘...I sort of laughed but it made me feel very very uncomfortable because as anyone with a secret that’s, you know, brought up in front of them, yeah it’s pretty uncomfortable and upsetting...’.

Sexualised humour was not always interpreted as offensive; not all participants perceived such comments as indicative of homonegative attitudes, as discussed by six (6) young people. Typically, this depended on the relationship held with the person delivering the joke and the context within which humorous comments were made. If participants felt comfortable in publicly identifying as non-heterosexual in their workplace and believed they held good relationships with their co-workers, queer-orientated jokes were often normalised. However, it is equally important to recognise that such comments were: a) predominantly initiated by other employees in relation to participants’ queer sexualities and less so by the participants’ themselves, and b) typically represented queer sexualities as inferior to heterosexuality, positioning queer subjects as the sexual other. For the few participants who did not feel safe in speaking about their own sexuality at work, such as Mia, Luke and Aiden, this type of humour confirmed their decision to keep silent and quietly ‘feel like shit.’

Fourth type of symbolic exclusion: Exclusion through witnessing

Twenty (20) young people from this study had witnessed at some point the exchange of homonegative comments and expressions in the workplace between co-workers, customers and clients. This also included witnessing the discriminatory treatment of

other queer employees. Witnessing was another type of symbolic exclusion that was indirectly experienced but far from covert. I include witnessing in this continuum of exclusionary practices as it represents a series of encounters that reinscribe workplaces as sexually exclusive spaces in the eyes of young queer people. Within these stories, participants are positioned as ‘silent witnesses’ or, what Jack describes as the ‘quiet little observer’, silently overhearing the homonegative or discriminatory comments of others while electing not to divulge their sexuality. Witnessing these kinds of exchanges suggests to young people that queer sexualities are not welcome, reinforcing work cultures of sexual exclusivity.

The staffroom was experienced as an uncomfortable space to access when having to witness the homonegative conversations of other staff, as discussed by four (4) participants (Steven, Ingrid, Kat and Michael). After one arduous lunchtime conversation with another teacher in the school staffroom, Ingrid quickly learnt not to mention her same-sex partner:

Ingrid – ... something came up one day and she [teaching colleague] had kids of her own and she said something about—oh, she lived with a man and they were in a relationship and his son was gay, and she was speaking about him one day... she said ‘Oh if any of my girls [daughters] ever felt like that I don’t what I’d do—I’d have to kick ‘em out!’ And just that sort of attitude that you always worry about with your own life and then think—Great! There goes another option of talking to someone and revealing a part of yourself that you’d kind of hoped to I guess.

As previously mentioned, homonegative expressions were frequently exchanged in highly masculinised work environments. While employed in a manufacturing factory for a short time, Jack found himself in a highly aggressive work culture, in which he frequently witnessed the exchange of ‘anti-gay sentiments’ between men:

Jack – ... I found it really difficult because there was such a strong and very vocal anti-gay sentiment within the workplace... And there probably wasn't a day that there wasn't a comment like 'Fucking faggots, you should kill 'em all!' or some really strong anti-gay sentiment, um and these were all big blokes too [nervous laughter].

While working in a large retail store, Kat had witnessed the ostracism of an older queer co-worker through claims of sexual harassment in the workplace. This was a painful experience for Kat as she tried to support a woman who she believed was being treated discriminately as a 'butch dyke'. Witnessing this kind of exclusion sent a clear message to Kat that queer sexualities were not welcome, and indeed punished, in her place of employment:

Kat – Eventually, another female staff member claimed sexual harassment against her. I spent my lunch hour with the older dyke as she cried from hurt and sheer frustration. She'd joked and flirted with this girl for months (she joked and flirted with all the girls) but now the girl was making a complaint. The older dyke never behaved in a way I believed to be unprofessional and her flirting was never any better or worse than all the hetero flirting that went on—it was just more scandalous because she was a butch dyke. I felt for this woman, I was outraged for this woman.

Being presumed heterosexual placed Kat within a limited space of safety on 'the inside' of the metaphorical closet:

Kat – I had always wondered what it'd be like to be out in my workplace, to have the spiteful rumours about me and the hurtful slander going on when I left the room. I was on the inside; my assumed heterosexuality put me there while her sexuality put her on the outside.

While not being ‘out’ provided Kat some protection from direct abuse, it did not diminish the trauma and anguish of watching another queer colleague facing discrimination or make Kat feel any safer as another queer employee.

ii) Material violence in the workplace

This second sub-theme describes the explicit practices of exclusion that were directly targeted at young queer people in their workplace—the material practices of violence. These practices included physical abuse, verbal abuse and harassment and were experienced as distressing, alarming and emotionally painful in effects. On one instance, physical violence had resulted in physical injury. Older men had perpetrated the majority of these violent acts. Victimisation perpetrated by other staff members was experienced repeatedly and often grew in intensity over time whereas abuse from customers and service recipients was often experienced as singular incidents. Through these violent expressions, young queer people were singled out and punished for transgressing sexual norms.

One (1) participant, Peggie, had been physically bullied and assaulted in her former workplace in a retail store for men’s clothing. During her employment, Peggie grew weary of the way she was constantly bullied as ‘one of the boys’ by her male co-workers based on her lesbian sexuality:

Peggie – I think that the guys [at work] they thought that you were one of the boys pretty much so you looked at chicks the way they looked at chicks, you mucked around like they’d muck around and it went from like a fun, joking sort of thing to me coming home with bruises from my shoulders to my elbows, on my arms and um yep, that was a lot of fun—not really [smiles]... and they thought that since you were a lesbian you could take the pain threshold of a male which certainly isn’t the case... and so I would retaliate and you know, say ‘Don’t!’ or hit them back and then they would just come and hit me more [smiles].

These incidents of ‘mucking around’ culminated in Peggie being physically assaulted by her two male managers:

Peggie – ... I think the final straw was when one Saturday one of my managers bear-hugged me from behind and took me out to the shoe room and the other manager was there and they taped my hands up behind my back and taped my feet up together and taped my mouth up and put me on the ground and threw shoes at me, leather shoes and it really hurt and they left me there to get out of it myself... I was freaking out, screaming, I was like ‘Please don’t do it, cause I’m claustrophobic and I’ll freak out,’ you know [pause] and I think I was doing the whole nervous laugh sorta thing. But as soon as I got out of it, I grabbed my bag and walked home and I made them pay me for the rest of the day.

This was one of several abusive incidents experienced by Peggie across her work history. During earlier employment at a franchise bookstore, Peggie had repeatedly been addressed in an abusive and humiliating manner by her older male manager:

Peggie – And when he found out that I was gay he just started to say the most rudest comments and I just thought ‘You’re a disgusting old man’... just stupid things like on our daily schedule he’d put me down as ‘pussy-licker’ rather than write my name and um before we’d open up the shop he’d go ‘Could the lesbi-bite please come to...?’ [Over loudspeaker system].

The expression of sexually explicit and feminised language, such as ‘pussy licker’, represent attempts to attack and shame Peggie as a non-heterosexual woman. Similarly, the two male managers who had perpetrated the assault at the clothing store perceived her identity as outside conventional femininity, justifying their actions of violent ‘play’. Both acts of violence were a means of punishing Peggie’s body and identity for standing outside normative positions of heterosexual femininity.

Peggie was one of nine (9) young people who reported being verbally harassed and abused in the course of their work. One case of harassment occurred during Ruby's appointment as a student union officer at a regional university in which she encountered a series of verbal attacks, amongst other forms of harassment, from her union colleagues. The following series of attacks began shortly after Ruby had been the guest editor for a sexually explicit issue of the local student magazine:

Ruby – Trying to sack me through motions in student council meetings; social intimidation which is very easy to do in a small town; sending anonymous harassing text messages to me that were mocking the paper and my ideals through letters to the editor; and questioning my integrity at every possible chance—usually during public meetings. They [union co-colleagues] would obstruct me in any possible way, usually bureaucratically to stop me from getting funding to bring out the paper, censoring the paper or threatening to sack all of my staff. Verbal harassment on-campus...

These events culminated in Ruby being publicly labelled as a 'paedophile', founded on her editorial comments in the local student paper in which she had written a parody piece on the association of homosexuality with paedophilia. This accusation was made public in the local media to shame Ruby. Consequently, these accusations fractured Ruby's relationships with her family members:

Ruby – It was mortifying. My sister threatened to never let me see my nephews who were at this point my only saving grace and kept me sane. I was horrified. I love children (in the good way) and am a staunch advocate against sexual abuse/assault. The people who accused me of paedophilia knew it would hurt...

While working at a department store, Michael had heard his male manager repeatedly refer to him under his breath as a 'fucking faggot'. This kind of verbal abuse was also perpetrated by customers and service recipients, as recounted by three (3) participants.

During the course of his work as an air-steward, Pearson recalled numerous incidents of verbal abuse and harassment from passengers: 'I've been slapped and pinched on the bum by guys travelling in drunken groups, I've been called fag, poof, homo, every name under the sun, I've even had quite a number of people from various religions completely ignore me'. Verbal expressions such as 'faggot' and 'poof' target both the gender and sexual status of young male workers, situating their sexuality outside normative understandings of masculinity and heterosexuality.

The majority of these young people received little or no support from other staff members. While working at a youth residential shelter, Alex had informed her colleagues about the verbally abusive comments she had received from clients. In response, Alex was advised that she needed to maintain a more 'professional level' in her interactions with clients:

Alex says: The other workers told me that although trust needs to be built we, as workers, need to maintain a professional level and keep our personal life out of our work. Perhaps they also worried what the kids would do in reaction to this information. I had already gotten some grief because they thought I was gay... Minor verbal abuse, the normal 'You're a lezzo' comments and how being 'A lezzo is disgusting'...

Without support from other staff, this equated to the majority of young people in this set of stories facing work-based abuse and harassment in isolation.

iii) Discrimination in the workplace

Acts of discrimination were formalised practices of exclusion, executed through processes of performance appraisal and human resources administration. Five (5) young people (Chester, Franky, Kat, Kheva and Peggie) shared their experiences of being treated unfairly at work. These participants described discrimination as negative treatment on the basis of their sexuality. This included oppressive experiences such as

having their work performance criticised, being refused leave entitlements or being unfairly dismissed. These forms of unfair treatment were exercised by male staff in senior and management positions. It was often difficult for participants to ascertain whether these discriminatory actions were motivated because of their sexuality, as sometimes this was not explicitly stated although surrounding circumstances led them to believe that this was the case.

Two (2) young men (Chester and Kheva) believed their work performance was unfairly criticised by their respective managers; their former employers had also unduly refused them access to leave entitlements. During Chester's time working as an administration clerk for an employment agency, he believed that he had been unfairly treated by the general manager because of a small processing error in data entry:

Chester – ... And it was a fairly blaring mistake that it was wrong... and I remember the general manager of the company actually called me up about it simply because he happened to be checking some of the work for our office and having a private screaming and yelling conversation about 'These sort of things shouldn't happen!' Interestingly enough that was probably around about the time a few of them had met my boyfriend and when the relationship had been more cemented, I guess. I had probably been a bit more relaxed about, you know, who knew...

Chester later applied for annual leave so he could spend time with his boyfriend who was visiting from an interstate location. The same manager refused his application. When Chester queried the refusal he was given no clear reason other than it was an unsuitable time in the organisation to be taking leave. However, Chester overcame this blockade before handing in his resignation: 'I think I did get a "light head cold" and took a few days off anyway, [smiles]—stick it up them!'

In a former office setting, which he described as simply 'awful', Franky had been the target of a series of discriminatory actions from his devoutly religious boss before having his employment terminated:

Franky – My former boss was a total asshole! I still don't know how, but someone allegedly told him I was gay and as he is an evangelical [Christian] he made things very difficult. E.g. would not let me leave work, had a 'gay' chair for me and everyone else used a normal office chair... It was truly horrible. I thought about going to the EOC [Equal Opportunity Commission] however, it was his word against mine and my fellow workers shared his views.

Franky was one of three (3) participants (Franky, Kheva and Kat) who believed they were unfairly dismissed on the grounds of their sexuality. While Franky believed this was the 'true' reason, the official reason provided was that he was 'unable to do his work'. Franky's capacities as an office administrator were criticised and he was labelled as an incompetent worker. Being fired not only threatened the financial health of these young people but it also questioned their skills and capabilities as paid workers. All these experiences of discrimination called into question the competency of young people as paid employees.

iv) The injurious effects of working in sexually exclusive workspaces

Experiencing practices of sexual exclusion at work took its toll on the emotional, mental, physical and financial wellbeing of participants; these were the injurious effects of working in sexually exclusive workspaces. Participants experienced these effects in varying ways. Sometimes these effects were experienced on a short-term basis, other times considerably longer. These effects were often experienced in a cumulative manner, illustrating the concurrent physical, financial and mental strain of homonegativity.

Emotional responses included participants feeling incredibly frustrated by their circumstances, and in some cases, afraid. Eight (8) young people, including Jack and Michael, spoke about the presence of fear that had accompanied them into the workplace. This sense of fear had grown from their encounters with the homonegative attitudes of other workplace participants. Michael began to fear his supervisor during his

employment in a large retail department store. Consequentially, Michael stopped attending work in fear of being rostered in the same department as his manager:

Michael – But I actually couldn't stand him before he [supervisor] said that but afterwards it got to the point where it wasn't so much that he was homophobic, it wasn't so much just that—it was the person and I was too scared to work in that environment and so I ended up just not going at all, I ended up just not putting my availability down because I knew they'd put me in Toys because that's all they ever did, and I was too [pause] I just couldn't handle that kind of person.

In spite of his supervisor's 'homophobic' comments, it was his aggressive manner that Michael feared the most. Michael described the psychosomatic symptoms that he experienced when returning to work each shift: 'I was physically shaking before I went because I knew that I just didn't want to be in that environment but because of other reasons I had to be'. Eventually, Michael could not bring himself to go to work and frequently called in 'sick', losing both rostered hours and income. Michael elaborated on how angry and helpless he felt about the intimidating behaviour of his department manager:

Michael – ... instead, it just made me incredibly angry and you want to just tell him to fuck off but you can't because of your position in the hierarchy. And so it's that anger that comes but you can't express it, you know, you can't just go and tell him what you think...

Several participants had sustained injuries to their emotional and mental functioning because of the violence and discrimination encountered at work. After the onslaught of verbal abuse Ruby had received, she was left feeling 'vulnerable' and 'drained'. Peggie and Trent spoke about the long-term mental and physical injuries, illustrating the cumulative effects of working in abusive and isolating work environments. For Peggie this involved feeling sick from the stress of having to go to work each day:

Peggie – ... it took a toll on me, like I got pretty sick the year I was working there... my immune system just completely broke down, I think from stress and everything and ah it completely broke down and I spent three months in bed pretty much. Yeh, it was a pretty shit time... But I'd try to go to work sick and couldn't last a day and so I went for a fair while without pay and stuff like that as a result of them [male managers at clothing store] being arseholes.

Nine (9) young people described themselves as the 'only gay' in the organisation. These young people described their acute sense of isolation and often perceived themselves as 'sitting on the fringe' within sexually exclusive workplaces. For Trent this sense of isolation was further exacerbated when feeling ignored by his male co-workers at the warehouse: 'It's frustrating, it leaves you more time to contemplate things, have I actually done something wrong? What have I done? If you have a problem it's very hard to approach people when they are like that...' His colleagues' exclusionary actions left Trent assuming responsibility for their conduct.

Experiences of homonegativity affected participants' financial health, especially as casual employees who did not receive leave provisions. Four (4) young people (Peggie, Aiden, Michael and Kat) spoke about the financial imperative to keep working despite wanting to avoid their workplaces, as discussed by Aiden:

Aiden – It can be very hard to go to work, but I guess I just try my best to ignore it (and hope he's [manager] coming in late that night) and just do what I'm paid to do. Well I need the job so I just go—that's it really.

The additional strain of financial hardship may in turn exacerbate other stressors in young people's lives including their physical, mental and emotional health.

Summary

The series of practices presented in this theme, outlined across a continuum of exclusionary practices, are all effective and insidious means of singling out and excluding queer sexualities in the workplace. However, there is a secondary purpose underlying these processes of exclusion: reiterating and reinforcing the normalcy of heterosexual relations. The policing and punishing of queer sexualities through practices of exclusion reinforces the workplace as a sexually exclusive and predominantly-heterosexual site. The last sub-theme presented demonstrates both the short-term and long-term effects of working in sexually exclusive workspaces. It also highlights the numerous cumulative injuries that compromise the psychosocial wellbeing of young queer workers.

Core theme two: Resisting and refuting sexually exclusive practices in the workplace

In the previous core theme, I presented young queer people's experiences of sexually exclusive practices. Participants did not passively tolerate these oppressive practices nor were these young people located in positions of powerlessness. In this study, young queer people deployed a range of strategies for counter-acting, dismissing, taking action against and questioning homonegative expressions and attitudes. These were strategies geared towards change. The four strategies discussed here demonstrate the ways in which participants actively resisted the normalising and vilifying logic of homonegative actions, beliefs and spoken comments. The primary purpose of this core theme is to bring together these strategies and highlight the agency and resourcefulness of young queer people in responding to and refuting practices of exclusion. These strategies were exercised within situational boundaries. The secondary purpose of this theme is to examine the conditions that facilitated the exercise of these strategies and prevented other young people from pursuing similar courses of action.

i) Vacating sexually exclusive spaces

Five (5) young people had made the choice to vacate their employment when their former workplaces became sites of sexual exclusion and discrimination. I include these accounts as they illustrate young people making active choices in refusing to participate in oppressive work-relationships and environments. Resigning from employment can be a powerful means of exercising control over alienating circumstances, as illustrated in Nick's and Chester's stories.

Nick eventually had enough of working at the computer sales store and decided he no longer wished to endure the constant teasing he had received from older male staff members and their 'foul' language: 'I felt like walking out all the time but I couldn't coz my job was hanging on by a thread. Eventually I decided I didn't need that kind of stress and I quit coz I didn't really need the job'. While Nick described himself as an 'easily replaced' employee, at the same time he positioned himself as actively choosing to leave his employment—he decided that he no longer wished to work in that stressful environment. Nick raised his concerns with one of his managers; however, he noticed no changes in the organisation. His decision to 'quit' could have been prevented by his managers. After tolerating the discriminatory actions of his manager, Chester decided to leave this 'uncomfortable environment': 'Basically just feeling uncomfortable there, job security in the main for other reasons... in the end I just didn't feel comfortable there, I didn't feel comfortable going to work, I thought "Bugger it—I'm leaving!"'

Participants did not always quit their employment with certainty; doubt was a common denominator in their stories of resigning. This suggests that this was not an easy decision to make. For a short time after 'quitting', Peggie had doubted her decision to leave:

Peggie – But it definitely did feel like it was in your head for awhile, for a good couple of months actually and after you quit as well you have the doubt of, you know, 'Why did I quit? I could have just put up with him', but then you think about all the comments and shrewd remarks and the actions that he [manager] did and nah, I couldn't have.

Participants who had chosen to leave their workplaces had other employment to go to or had little difficulty in finding new employment; vacating their workplace had not adversely interfered with their career paths. Other young people acknowledged that leaving their current employment could place them under financial stress. However, the one significant difference between choosing to leave and being forced to leave is that they had greater opportunities to prepare and plan for their departure on their terms.

ii) Dismissing and questioning homonegative expressions

Dismissing and questioning the homonegative comments voiced by others in the workplace were two distinct strategies in refusing to tolerate the vilifying beliefs conveyed through these comments. These strategies were demonstrated by sixteen (16) young people in this study. Homonegative statements were frequently viewed as a conservative and archaic set of beliefs that the majority of participants dismissed from their own belief systems. In the words of Pearson, 'I mean, homophobia's so 1990s!'

Fundamentalist religious convictions were the most apparent and insidious set of beliefs spoken aloud in participants' interactions with other staff. Three (3) young women (Peggie, Bubbles and Mia) discussed how they had quietly dismissed the religious opinions of moral condemnation voiced by co-workers from Christian and Muslim fundamentalist backgrounds. Participants were not only familiar with these fundamentalist arguments but also the lack of logic contained within these belief statements. From Bubble's perspective, these arguments lacked both insight and logic:

Bubbles – I don't know, it seems to me if people would actually think 'Is there anything actually wrong with this?' then logic should say that you come to the conclusion that it [homosexual relationships] is ok, there's nothing wrong with it. But people are still coming to the conclusion that it's weird and freaky and wrong—which has no brain! [laughs]. Because I have this dogmatic view that it's just ok, there's nothing wrong with it!

On some occasions participants chose to walk away when hearing homonegative comments or not to associate with the people concerned; others had chosen to ignore these comments or to 'bite their tongue'. Five (5) participants had openly questioned the homonegative comments of other staff members, mainly in third person. While they had questioned colleagues and students, they did not directly disclose or refer to their sexuality. This strategy provided a limited degree of protection from targeted abuse. One exception was Trent who was 'out' in his workplace at the chemical warehouse. In opposition to the sexual stereotypes held by his male co-workers, Trent had sought to single-handedly challenge their totalising beliefs about gay men:

Trent says: The gay community is as diverse as any; the word being gay does not automatically outline a set of behaviours an individual will have. Normally I just bring the point up, 'Well am I like that?' And of course they say 'No but you're different', and normally I just respond with 'Exactly, that was one gay person—not all' ... you might not have stopped them believing it, but you have made them think a bit... that's all you can do, challenge the stereotypes in hope that sense kicks in.

Aiden had gently questioned the homonegative and offensive comments voiced by other people employed at the restaurant. However, he was perpetually aware that the question of his own sexuality could arise at any point during these conversations:

Aiden – If I do decide to say something I might say things like, 'Easy does it!', 'That's a bit much, isn't it?', 'Is using that word necessary?', 'They're just like everyone else you know?', 'Who cares man? We're all human' etc... Obviously I wouldn't say something like that to someone who would be likely to reply 'What, are you a poof too?' or 'What are you, some kind of poofa?', but rather someone who is 'educatable' or at least borderline, I guess.

Three (3) young people (Ingrid, Steven and Moskoe) had verbally challenged the derogatory use of the term 'gay' by children, adolescents and co-workers alike. Ingrid

shared the various strategies used to highlight to her secondary school students the absurdity of referring to people and objects as ‘gay’:

Ingrid – ...you can joke with them and say ‘Is that chair attracted to the other one beside it? Is that what you mean?’ or make them stand up in front of the class and read the dictionary definition [of ‘gay’], but you know at the same time it’s still difficult, mainly because if there’s other kids in my class that identify as gay or as non-heterosexual in general how are they going to feel?

Ingrid acknowledges that when using these strategies in the classroom there is always the impact on other queer students to consider. The same consideration can be extended to other queer employees in the workplace who are silent witnesses to participants’ attempts to speak out against homonegativity. However, it could also be interpreted as an affirming experience to witness another colleague, or in Ingrid’s case, a teacher actively challenging prejudiced speech through the voice of authority and confidence.

iii) Taking action through informal and formal strategies

In these stories, participants elaborated on their attempts to take action against the homonegative expressions of others through both informal and formal strategies of change. Informal strategies involved retaliating against the homonegative beliefs and actions of others in the workplace. Formal strategies included contacting the Head Office to lodge a complaint.

On an informal basis, Pearson elaborated on the quick-witted means by which flight attendant staff sought revenge against abusive passengers on board their flights:

Pearson – It really is water off our backs—“It’s our plane, and its not on” is a common catchcry amongst crew! Crews are generally very protective of each other, and anything we can’t sort out quick wittedly amongst us, will be sorted out by other means... revenge is very much gained, usually by pointing problem passengers out to customs supervisors, who take a much larger interest in the person than they would probably be expecting!

In these situations, Pearson had the protection and support of his fellow crewmembers around him; very few participants had access to the same level of collegial support. One (1) young person, Peggie, discussed how she had pursued both informal and formal action through two separate workplaces on her own. On an informal level, Peggie had fiercely argued with her ‘sleazy’ manager about his abusive and discriminatory treatment at the bookstore. She had also physically retaliated against his unwelcome sexualised behaviour:

Peggie – ... [general manager] he was really a sleaze, you know, and even at our Christmas dinner I went and had a few drinks and he kept coming up and he thought he had the right to come up and try and touch me and you know, ah he was just a friggin’ tosser.

Paul – What would you do when he would try and pull those kinds of moves?

Peggie – I’d hit him [Laugh] I did that night anyway—right across the face.

On a formal level, Peggie had later raised her concerns about her manager’s abusive treatment through a resignation letter directed to the company’s Head Office. After leaving the bookstore, she felt immensely satisfied when she received recognition for her letter. This had been an affirming experience for Peggie in which the victimisation she had experienced was validated by other people from the same company and in higher positions of authority:

Peggie – ... I got a phone call from the Australian manager of the company and they were doing an investigation of my manager and he got fired... I was very happy, very happy because it just goes to show it's not in your head and you're not pretending that someone is victimising you or you're not being victimised by someone, you know, he was just a bad person.

The same level of validation was not received during her employment at the clothing store. Instead, Peggie felt like her concerns were dismissed when she raised them with her managers during her final few days of employment:

Peggie – And I said something to the owner... He said 'I'm really sorry that you feel that way but if you want to look for further employment feel free to, I'll employ you until then' and I turned around and said to him 'I shouldn't have to look for further employment, you should be looking at your managers' but nothing really came from it so I looked for a new job and quit.

No one had made formal complaints through internal grievance processes. Michael had weighed up whether it was worthwhile lodging a complaint about his department manager's aggressive and abusive conduct at the retail store. However, he decided that this was a futile exercise based on the burden of proof and on the potential risk to his future employment as a casual worker:

Michael – But I went through this whole period of ‘Should I go and report him to the HR manager? Should I go and say something?... and you go through this whole thing of weighing up what’s worse, you weigh up whether you should go and tell someone and maybe get sacked in the end because you can’t prove anything or do you just be quiet about it—and of course, I was quiet about it, I never ended up telling anyone.

External legal and trade union bodies were not a source of support for young queer employees in this study. Only four (4) young people mentioned the services of industrial unions. Two (2) of these participants were aware of the union as a support-provider if needed in the future. No one had contacted their union representatives over experienced incidents of homonegative abuse and discrimination. Equally, no one had pursued their complaints of discrimination and harassment through external legal bodies such as equal opportunity commissions (EOC), though at least ten (10) participants communicated their awareness of workplace discrimination and harassment as unlawful acts. Franky considered taking up his concerns with the EOC and sought counsel from a solicitor. He later reconsidered this to be a futile exercise based on the burden of proof. Choosing not to seek out legal action does not mean that these young people did not wish to seek justice; several young people expressed their willingness to seek out retribution against their former employers. However, after leaving their workplaces they no longer wished to revisit these negative experiences and preferred to focus on their current employment.

iv) Educating others within censored boundaries

This set of accounts represents the experiences of participants seeking to connect with and educate other staff members about queer lives, communities and relationships as well as advocating for queer-related issues in the workplace. Part of the purpose of this kind of strategy was to dismantle heterosexist beliefs and stereotypes. This was the most popular response with ten (10) participants, who discussed in detail their attempts to ‘enlighten’ others. The majority of these young people had connected with others in the

workplace before embarking on this process of awareness raising. Sharing supportive relationships assisted them in their educative conversations without necessarily threatening their established work-relationships.

Participants made use of their connections with other employees as opportunities to discuss queer sexualities and to ‘open their minds’, often using their own lives as reference points. Through conversations at work, Kat had pushed the boundaries of what her co-workers perceived as morally acceptable and unacceptable:

Kat – If someone can accept something that we've been talking about then I throw them the next thing and see if they can accept that—dykes are okay, well then what about gay men, gays and lesbians are okay, well then what about bisexual people, holding hands is okay, well then what about kissing in public, de facto relationships are okay, well then what about children, normal sex is okay, well then what about dildos, it's okay to talk about it in high school, well why not primary school etc... That said I will only push people's boundaries and sometimes their buttons in environments and situations where I feel safe enough to do so...

As acknowledged by Kat, this process of ‘pushing the boundaries’ could only be safely facilitated in work-relationships which were conducive to such challenging conversations. Two (2) participants (Ingrid and Alex) had proactively facilitated the provision of queer-related resources within their workplaces once they had received some indication of support. For instance, Ingrid had helped initiate a queer arm of their local teachers’ union branch with a few of her queer colleagues from other schools.

Three (3) young people (Peggie, Moskoe and Trent) had worked hard to ‘prove’ their sense of similarity as just ‘ordinary’ colleagues who also happened to be queer. Whilst working at a car dealership Peggie had raised the awareness of an older male manager by emphasising the ordinariness of her same-sex relationship:

Peggie – ... One of my managers, he's got a footballing background, he's very much a bloke, he's been with the same women since he was seventeen or eighteen and stuff like that... pretty sheltered sort of life [laughs]. When I first started working there he used to ask me actually genuine questions about the gay community and what everyone did and what it was like, and I'd just tell him we do normal stuff, we [partner and I] have a house to run, and you've got to do your laundry and dishes and stuff like that, you know, really just domestic sort of stuff, and he'd go 'Yeh right, never really thought about it'.

The majority of awareness-raising discussions occurred within censored and what might be perceived as socially 'acceptable' boundaries. In each of these accounts, except for Kat's, awareness-raising conversation focused on couple-based relationships, same-sex households and the estimated population of queer citizens (or, validity through numbers). Conversations rarely strayed into the more intricate fields of discussing sexual pleasures, activities and fantasies. However, in many instances these educative discussions were effective in generating respectful relationships between co-workers. While these conversations may not trouble normative ideas about sexuality, success may lie in simply making these environments safe spaces for young queer workers.

Summary

Despite their encounters with exclusionary practices in the workplace, participants were not deterred from exercising their own strategies in responding to and resisting homonegative expressions and actions. These strategies included ignoring and questioning homonegative beliefs, taking informal and formal action against homonegative actions and expressions and attempting to educate others. Some participants had also chosen to vacate their employment and leave oppressive work environments. Conversely, these strategies occurred under certain conditions and limitations, such as the reassurance of pre-established working relationships, and through discussing sexuality within censored margins. While these strategies may result in changes in work-relationships 'on the shop floor', it is uncertain as to how useful these

strategies may be in facilitating broader change in workplace cultures of exclusion, heterosexism and homonegativity. On the other hand, it should not be the sole responsibility of young queer workers to initiate this kind of systemic change.

Concluding comments to the chapter

This chapter has begun to illustrate how young queer people experience their everyday work environments. This has been illustrated through the presentation of the first two core themes in which there is a central thread—the workplace is experienced as a sexually exclusive space in which young queer people feel unsafe and unwelcome as non-heterosexual participants. This is evident through the continuum of exclusionary practices exercised by other workplace actors in separating, vilifying and punishing queer bodies in the workplace. Implicit within this theme is the contradiction that other workers are not equally excluded, abused or treated discriminately on the basis of heterosexuality. Instead, heterosexuality is enshrined through the exclusionary practices that reinforce the normalcy of heterosexual relations.

In spite of these symbolic and material practices, queer identities and desires cannot be banished from the workplace. Participants demonstrated that they are not passive victims but strategic agents in responding to and resisting sexually exclusive practices. The exercise of exclusionary practices and homonegative expressions can incite counter-resistance; exclusionary workplaces can unintentionally have enabling effects. This set of stories illustrates that power is not wielded by one organisational actor over another but alternatively, contested between contexts and relationships. Regardless of participants' proactive responses, this did not detract from the injurious ways in which sexually exclusive practices impacted on their health and wellbeing in this study. The next chapter continues the presentation of findings by focusing on young people's negotiations of the workplace as a regulatory and silencing space.

CHAPTER SIX

Experiencing the workplace as a regulatory space and a silencing space

Introduction to the chapter

This chapter continues to tell the story of young people's experiences of the workplace as queer employees. The previous chapter illustrated how young people experienced the workplace as a sexually exclusive space and described the continuum of exclusionary practices perpetrated against queer workers. The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate how young queer people in this study experienced the workplace as a regulatory and as a silencing space. In this chapter, I discuss the regulatory effects of experiencing and anticipating exclusionary practices on the work-lives of young queer people. I then elaborate on the patterns of silence and disclosure, which render queer sexualities both invisible and visible in the workplace context. Table 7 provides a summary of the three core themes and related sub-themes presented.

The first core theme examines how young queer employees experienced the workplace as a regulatory space. I describe the contexts and practices of bodywork undertaken by participants in regulating their own actions, speech and performances. The fundamental purpose of these practices was to ensure that queer sexualities remained invisible in the workplace. The second core theme elucidates on the multiple states of sexual silence assumed by young people within their work-relationships; the three distinctive states discussed in this core theme constitute the workplace as a silencing space. Further, I examine how the silence surrounding the expression of queer sexualities can have both facilitating and suppressive functions for young queer workers. In the third core theme, I discuss the various ways in which young people disclosed queer sexualities within their work-relationships and consider how the process of 'coming out' has the potential to bring affirmation and anguish for young queer workers. My intention is to highlight the complexity of attempting to manage what is frequently experienced as an unmanageable process.

Table 7

Summary of the three core themes and related sub-themes presented in this chapter

Core themes	Sub-themes
Core theme three: The workplace as a regulatory space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) The imperative to sustain invisibility in the workplace ii) First process of bodywork: Monitoring and modifying speech and communication iii) Second process of bodywork: 'Playing it straight' iv) Third process of bodywork: The selective use of silence v) Resisting processes of bodywork
Core theme four: The workplace as a silencing space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Silence as an intimately shared state ii) Silence as an ambiguous state iii) Silence as an inescapable state
Core theme five: Managing the unmanageable—sexual disclosure in the workplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) The 'coming out' imperative ii) Doing disclosure in the workplace iii) Responses to disclosure: an unpredictable process iv) The (in)convenience of workplace gossip

Core theme three: The workplace as a regulatory space

In this study, young queer people experienced the workplace as a regulatory space. Participants did not have to encounter the practices of exclusion discussed in the previous chapter to experience the impact of homonegativity. The anticipation of homonegative attitudes and actions from others in the workplace, as well as previous encounters with homonegativity, had regulatory effects over participants' spoken words and bodily actions. Accordingly, young queer people engaged in a process of self-regulating and modifying their actions, speech and self-presentation in the workplace to ensure that their bodies and identities were not perceived or interpreted as non-heterosexual; in short, ensuring that queer sexualities remained invisible. I describe these processes as 'bodywork': the self-regulation of the queer body to sustain invisibility and protection from homonegative harm.

In this core theme, I outline participants' reflections on how they engaged in various processes of bodywork within work cultures and relationships that did not feel safe, accepting or valuing of queer sexualities. I focus on four central aspects of bodywork: 1) the imperative to sustain invisibility; 2) the monitoring and modification of speech and communication; 3) the performance of what participants described as 'straight' personas; and 4) the use of selective silence as a protective measure. The final sub-theme acknowledges that bodywork is not a totalising process in the workplace. Young queer workers did not always undertake processes of self-regulation, in spite of their concerns about being visible as queer subjects under the judgmental gaze of others.

i) The imperative to sustain invisibility in the workplace

There were certain work contexts in which participants believed they had to remain invisible as queer workers; these were contexts in which participants felt they had to undertake processes of bodywork. This was an imperative across four distinct work

contexts: working in highly masculinised work settings, working with clients dependent on care, working with children and adolescents, and working under previous memories of homonegative abuse in the workplace and in other social settings.

The imperative to keep queer sexualities invisible was explicit in participants' accounts of working in what were described as 'straight' and masculine-dominated territories. This was a necessity for four (4) young men in this study and was founded on fears of exclusion, reprisal and hostility from male co-workers. Jack discussed the imperative to stay invisible during his employment within the highly masculinised setting of a manufacturing factory. Fear of homonegative abuse was a highly influential factor:

Jack – I knew there was no way it could be safe for me in this workplace. Um so I avoided as much as possible any sort of social contact between the [male] workers, tried to just go and do my job and go home, and whenever there was lunch or smoko or whatever trying to stay out of the conversation or just let them do their own thing which tends to work most of the time...

Luke reflected on the male-dominated setting of the beach and the pool where he worked as a surf lifesaver and swimming instructor. While physical contact between men was a regular component of lifesaver training, Luke perceived lifesaving as a largely 'male' and 'heterosexual' occupation. He believed that due to the high level of physical contact between lifesavers it would be too uncomfortable to be 'out' as a gay man. The safest alternative was to ensure that his same-sex attractions remained undetected by his co-workers. His attractions were not always easy to conceal:

Luke – And it was awkward too because when I was doing my surf lifesaving I had to— cause when we're learning how to carry people out of the water and how to put people on a board, it was really awkward working with the other guys [smiles] both of them were pretty attractive and we we're just wearing our speedo's or whatever and you sort of had to lie on top of them—like getting them on the board and then lie on top of them and I'd be thinking 'If only you knew! I wish this over quickly' [laughs]... like that would have been uncomfortable.

Participants' sexual lives were frequently ruled out as an unacceptable subject for discussion while working with people who were dependent on their care, such as people living with debilitating physical or intellectual disabilities. For two (2) participants, the threat of being perceived as a sexual predator and being falsely accused of 'taking advantage' of vulnerable clients overshadowed their work as carers. For a short time, Ruby was employed as a carer for clients with disabilities. While having to participate in a highly physical and intimate caring relationship with a male client, Ruby believed she had to 'hide' her sexuality in fear of losing both their relationship and her employment:

Ruby – ... It was a very personal atmosphere. I was in his home. There was a lot of trust involved in the role. He was basically helpless and I had complete control of him. I didn't want him to feel uncomfortable with me or disgusted. I felt in a way that I had to hide to protect him but also to protect myself because I desperately needed the money and couldn't afford to lose the job... I was afraid that maybe he wouldn't like me anymore.

Fear was a pervasive theme in the context of maintaining acceptable work-relationships with children and adolescents; in particular, fear of being perceived as a sexual threat to the moral sanctity of younger bodies. This was a concern raised by five (5) participants (Steven, Luke, Madeleine, Ingrid and Nadi) located across occupations such as teaching, child-care and youth work. Sustaining invisibility in the presence of children and adolescents rested on two concerns: first, how parents would respond to knowing that

queer employees were working directly with their children and second, participants' awareness of dominant sexual stereotypes, in particular the association of queer individuals with child sexual abuse and moral misconduct. Participants were well aware how any arising accusations could jeopardise their current employment, future careers and organisational status.

In this work context, children and youth were the symbolic conduits through which dominant cultural messages of acceptability were transmitted. Queer sexualities and same-sex relationships were believed to be unacceptable and therefore dangerous topics to discuss with children. This group of young people were highly alert to the homonegative association between queer bodies and sexual abuse:

Ingrid – To be honest I think it's the connotation that often people put all non-heterosexual people in the same bucket as murderers, rapists and paedophiles, often you'll just be reading any old article in the newspaper and they're listing all these sub-groups and suddenly we pop up as well! Like why not, you know, we often wield a sword and harm children! So I think that paedophilia aspect of it is something that really creeps me out, I mean that's the most horrendous thing I can think of being connected to my sexuality...

While none of these young people had been directly confronted by parental accusations, it was the frightening possibility of facing accusations that had a powerfully debilitating effect on their spoken words and actions:

Madeleine says: It's frightening. Because I've been worried that their [children's] comments will get back to parents, who will then judge me. That they'd either get angry that I'd been supposedly discussing personal and potentially sexual issues with young children (which is not true, because even though I might challenge things, I always try to distance myself from it), or the old homosexual-paedophile link will spring to mind, and people will get paranoid.

Four (4) young people described how they had altered their actions and movements under the keen gaze of parents, managers and other staff members. For example, Ingrid was deeply concerned about being on her own with individual children and believed she always needed to be in sight of other children and colleagues. Ingrid reflected on how this vigilant practice sometimes compromised her attention to individual students' needs:

Ingrid – And so I guess I'm conscious of being alone with kids at all, and I mean all teachers really have to be as you know, um but I'm always in sight, I always sit by the window, I try to have more than one person in the room at once, so just automatically... I guess you're just very aware of everything else and your possibly not 100% into what's going on, into what you should be doing.

As a swimming instructor, Luke was ever vigilant of the appraising gaze of parents in his work with children in the learn-to-swim program. This program routinely involved physical contact as part of his instruction:

Luke – And I was very uncomfortable being gay in a– [pause] simply because I knew how other people react or some people reacted to being gay, and especially working like with young children, like I didn't really want to have to deal with—like its bad enough having to deal with legal issues working with young children like where you have your hands and, you know, stuff like that and how hold you hold them in the water, and you have parents watching like a hawk, and the swimming establishment really focusing on you.

In assuming positions of care and responsibility with children and adolescents, participants felt compelled to erase any significations to their sexuality from their speech and conduct—to stay invisible as queer workers.

Undertaking bodywork and sustaining sexual invisibility was also a priority for young people who had previously experienced homonegative treatment in former workplaces or

other social settings. Former experiences of abuse and discrimination in the workplace had heavily influenced the decisions of three (3) young people (Kat, Chester and Franky) to keep silent about their sexuality in later employment. For example, Franky preferred to stay invisible as a queer employee based on his previous experiences of discriminatory treatment from a member of management.

Traumatic experiences in secondary schools influenced the decision of three (3) participants (Jack, Ingrid and Sam) to keep silent about their sexuality in later employment. Not-so-distant encounters with homonegative abuse during their secondary schooling seeped into their perceptions and anxieties about the workplace. Jack believed that his fears of 'anti-gay' bullying that had occurred during his secondary schooling later accompanied him into the workplace. During his first few years of work-life, Jack consequentially remained wary of having to re-live these haunting experiences:

Jack – ... I mean especially in high school, I mean high school boys are so anti-gay, you know, that every second day you are hearing really strong anti-gay sentiments so that really entrenched that for me I suppose at that time. So by the time I actually left high school and started working I had all this fear based around being openly gay.

This was particularly challenging for Ingrid and Sam whose work required them to participate in school-environments. These environments reminded them of their own painful experiences as school students. As described by Sam: '...what I went through at school... It's like being put back in that situation all over again...'

ii) First process of bodywork: Monitoring and modifying speech and communication

Many participants reflected on the methods through which they sustained invisibility in the workplace, the processes by which they regulated their speech, actions and self-

presentation. Accordingly, the first process of bodywork undertaken by young queer people was to monitor and modify their speech and spoken communication to remove any direct or telling references to their sexuality.

For some young people this required selecting terms and language that did not reveal either the gender of their partner or the existence of their same-sex relationship. Seven (7) young people elaborated on the methods of obscuring this knowledge in work-relationships. Careful consideration was given to how much information was necessary to disclose in conversations at work, as illustrated in Madeleine's account of disguising her partner from her manager's knowledge:

Madeleine says: Oh, I've told white lies to one boss. He's a nice guy so I do care what he thinks of me, but he seems very conservative. And twice he asked me if I could work, and once was the night of my girlfriend's 21st, and the other time was when we'd planned to go away for the weekend. So I said it was my "best friend". But that's frustrating because it doesn't have the same impact—As in, most people would see time together as a couple being more precious than time with a friend.

Other young people (Joseph and Bubbles) had preferred to use gender-neutral pronouns to disguise the gender of their partner, while Mia had substituted references to her girlfriend as 'her boyfriend' when in the company of her co-workers.

Sustaining this process of bodywork was extremely laborious. To illustrate, Alexis agonised over monitoring her speech to ensure that she did not accidentally disclose the gender of her partner while working as a cleaner at a Christian elderly retirement home:

Alexis – What's frightening about not being out is the fact that I know that it's going to come out of my mouth sometime soon and I know also that I've had a few very close calls. It's hard talking about relationships without reflecting back on your own. Saying 'my ex' and then trying not to be gender specific is very hard for me... I feel sick to the base of my stomach when someone asks me if I have a boyfriend.

During work conversations, some young people attempted to dodge sexuality-related questions. Regardless of some participants' attempts to keep their sexuality invisible when working with children and adolescents, this did not prevent students and younger clients from asking very public questions. Participants were perceived as sexual subjects in the eyes of children who demanded answers. It was hard work having to evade these questions, as Madeleine discovered during her employment in an out-of-school care program. In this instance, other colleagues supported Madeleine in staying invisible:

Madeleine – It's hard sometimes. Even in my main job, where I'm out to all the staff, I have to be careful around the kids. A couple of them have overheard something said between staff members and have directly asked me if I'm a lesbian or if by 'girlfriend' did I mean 'a girl who is your friend, or someone who you are going out with?'. That is always a bit scary... Then they might ask one of the other staff members, who will tell an outright lie and the matter will be forgotten. Sometimes I want to just be open and honest with the kids because if I don't, then who will? But then it's hard to know how parents will react.

Similarly, Steven and Ingrid were confronted with questions in the confines of the classroom. When faced with the taunting and inevitable question of '*Are you gay?*' from the mouths of primary and secondary students, both Ingrid and Steven chose to ignore this question or to respond in third person:

Steven – My kids are pretty street smart and have asked me several times ‘Are you gay?’ which I just refuse to answer or tell them that it's an inappropriate question. I did once tell them that I didn't like them using that word because I had friends who were gay and I found it insulting that they used the word in such a negative way.

Not knowing when to expect these questions or not always feeling prepared to evade these kinds of queries placed further strain on these young people in their interactions with co-workers, clients and students.

iii) Second process of bodywork: ‘Playing it straight’

The second process of bodywork entailed ‘playing it straight’. Participants described how they intentionally acted ‘straight’ in front of other staff to appear heterosexual, to remain invisible as queer subjects and to fit in with the normative expectations of other employees. This bodily performance involved, in the words of Pearson: ‘...act[ing] really tough, don’t talk about guys, don’t talk about outside work stuff at all’. These accounts were relayed in-depth by six (6) young men who believed they had to act straight while working in masculinised environments. The majority of these straight performances were set in male-majority work settings in industries such as sports and leisure, and manufacturing. In contrast, young women did not discuss ‘acting straight’ in their stories of the workplace.

Heterosexuality was perceived as an identity that can be consciously performed and signified through speech, communicated interests and bodily movements. For Michael acting straight at work was about fitting into his work department as one of the blokes. This involved an almost hyper-masculine performance:

Michael – umm [pause] I guess in Toys [department] my language changed, my persona as much as it can changed, that changed a bit as I started using words like ‘mate’ [laughs] you know, I even had a conversation about cars once and I know nothing about cars... so it was more the physical, the language thing, you just take part in this very primitive blokey type talk because if you don’t, at least then anyway, if you didn’t do that you just didn’t fit in to that environment.

Michael noted how his performance changed between working downstairs on the registers, in what he described as a far more comfortable space working alongside female-staff, compared to working upstairs in the more masculinised terrain of ‘Toys’. Michael acknowledged how tiring this process became: ‘If you’re constantly adjusting who you are to fit someone else’s standard, that wears you down, that becomes really difficult.’

Jack discussed ‘playing it straight’ as a more subconscious performance that he automatically resumed when in the company of other ‘blokes’ during his employment for an airline company. Jack reflected on how his actions and speech differed between working in the feminised space of the front desk compared to working in the predominantly-male space of the baggage handling area:

Jack – But here [front desk] I felt quite safe and I was openly me, I was Jack when I was working out there. But I actually found it quite interesting because I would notice within two minutes from working out the front and interacting with ‘my girls’ out the front, I’d walk out the back to do something... I would change [clicks fingers] just like that, the way I spoke would change and my mannerisms were changed and I would be much more blokey out the back [chuckles]. I found that a really interesting insight actually when I was working there because it was actually automatic, I didn’t consciously say ‘Ok, this is a high-risk situation, I need to be careful’, it was just an automatic change in my behaviour...

Jack noted how his bodily actions, speech and mannerisms changed as he moved between two different spaces within a matter of metres in the same location. Jack discussed how he had regularly chosen to leave ‘gay-Jack’ at the door and play ‘straight-Jack’ instead, particularly if he was uncertain as to how other staff would respond to his sexuality. He described this complicated process as ‘creating a second life’ that grew in enormity over time and became more difficult to disengage from:

Jack – It becomes quite entangled actually once you start doing that [laughs]... you sort of [pause] almost creating a second life for yourself, a second personality, and the more details you add and the more it grows it becomes bigger and bigger every week that you feed it.

For Luke, ‘playing it straight’ involved creating imaginary girlfriends whom he discussed with his male co-workers. This heterosexual performance involved engaging with other young men’s expectations about keeping on the ‘lookout’ for scoring with girls. This performance was also a useful deterrent for his parents at home: ‘...neither of the other guys were seeing girls so it was sort of like, you know, young men always on the lookout for anyway they could get a girl...’

Two (2) young men did not believe they had to hide the gender of their partner but still felt compelled to emphasise the normality of their same-sex relationship when in the company of other male employees. While Trent had discussed his same-sex relationship at work, he believed it was important to continue accentuating the similarities between his male colleagues and himself. This involved socially distancing himself from the non-masculine behaviour of other gay men and not putting his ‘sexuality in people’s faces’:

Trent says: ... you hear stories about the guys’ [at work] weekends out and that a ‘poof’ with a limp wrist and no masculinity at all trying to hit on them and how uncomfortable it made them, that uncomfortable feeling usually turns into resentment and then ultimately hate. But then they look at me and they don’t see the gay people that they have in their mind, I’m just a guy who respects them so in turn most of the time they respect me.

In seeking to connect with the other men at work, Trent had attempted to participate in their 'straight' conversations, 'playing it straight' in certain interactions: '... if you want to be in with the boys well you just play along at times'. However, his co-workers did not reciprocate Trent's interest in their lives. As illustrated in the stories above, it was the sole responsibility of these young men to perform as heterosexual in the workplace for the reassurance of others as well as for their own protection.

iv) Third process of bodywork: The selective use of silence

The third process of bodywork entailed the selective use of silence in work conversations. A small group of young people discussed the use of silence as a protective measure for keeping queer sexualities from common knowledge. This was another means of staying invisible as queer subjects.

Shirley and Bruce were concerned that by being identified as non-heterosexual their relationships with other staff members would deteriorate. Shirley was apprehensive that her co-workers at the call centre would perceive her in a less favourable light, after getting to know Shirley as a 'straight' woman who had relationships with men. Consequentially, when she began seeing women on an intimate basis, Shirley initially chose to keep silent about her new sexual relationships:

Shirley – ...it wasn't that they wouldn't accept it but a) they'd be shocked and b) (and this is probably the big one) I didn't feel comfortable mentioning it to them. I was worried that it might change their perception of me and, more importantly, the way they acted around me.

Four (4) young people (Bubbles, Kristy, Madeleine and Peggie) had overheard the prejudiced attitudes and religious beliefs voiced by other employees in the same organisation, as discussed in the previous chapter. When in the presence of their vehemently religious colleagues, these four young people chose to remain silent about

their own sexuality. Peggie's older co-workers at the photographic shop had frequently expressed their religious disapproval of queer sexualities amidst work conversations. As a result, Peggie was resolute that she was not going to share this intimate knowledge about her sexuality, especially when she had to maintain working relationships with these same colleagues on a daily basis:

Peggie – I reckon it would have been very quiet 5 to 6 days every week [laughs] I don't reckon there would have been a lot of talking going on at all, I think I would have um probably become the biggest bitch at work, would have been so frustrated not being able to talk there I would have just been cranky at myself for saying something in the first place... but there's nothing you can do about it, you know, I'm not going to sit there and be in debate with them because I had to work with them...

Keeping silent was a preferred choice for some young people before feeling confident in speaking about same-sex attractions at work. Four (4) young people (Nadi, Steven, Kat and Shirley) shared their first experiences in the labour market during their mid to late-teens. This was typically in casual employment within the retail and service sectors whilst studying at secondary school. During this time, these young people had preferred not to discuss their sexuality with others while they were going through a process of making sense of their sexual differences. As Steven states: 'I was still working things out in my head myself then'. Kat described it as a 'pretty daunting task for anyone' when she was considering how to 'come out' to her family and friends before contemplating how she might have approached this issue at work.

v) Resisting processes of bodywork

The imperative to sustain invisibility and to conceal queer sexualities was by no means all encompassing. While there were many invitations into keeping queer sexualities invisible in the workplace young queer people did not always adhere to processes of

bodywork. This suggests that bodywork is a provisional process that can be resisted as well as undertaken.

Participants did not always stay silent about their sexuality despite the level of protection it provided. Silence was often experienced as a temporary status. After time, Ingrid and Steven felt comfortable enough to discuss their sexuality with select members of staff, even though they felt unable to broach this subject with their students. Indeed, Ingrid self-selected to be a queer representative for her local union network, as mentioned in the preceding chapter. Likewise, several participants resisted concealing their sexuality under the judgemental gaze of other parties in the workplace. This is illustrated in Powderoo's story of visibly walking out of the department store in the company of a transgender friend who had attracted the insensitive stare of Powderoo's co-workers:

Powderoo – ... it was like when I was going out to do checkout, to the register or whatever and she [friend] followed me and we were just talking, and then there were staff members that walk around and that sort of thing, then I got some looks and a couple of comments. Just some of the comments like 'Look—she's talking to that old tranny', and that sorta stuff, and I just think 'Oh for god's sake, get over it!'

In this scenario, the heightened-visibility of a trans-identifying woman transitioning between gender identities immediately attracted attention from other employees; this same gaze was then turned onto Powderoo who was visibly singled out as a non-normative subject through association. At the end of her shift, Powderoo walked out of the store with her friend, refusing to hide or deny their association: 'I had to go sign-off because someone would have yelled at me... then we finished it and then we walked out together, like I wasn't going to hide that I was friends with her'. This statement carries not only recognition of the critical stare of other employees in the workplace but also the defiance not to be deterred by this scrutinizing gaze.

Summary

This core theme has examined the context and processes of bodywork engaged in by young queer people in this study as an effect of both experiencing and anticipating homonegativity in the workplace. Participants described a series of self-regulatory processes such as the modification of speech and communication, the performance of ‘straight’ personas and the selective use of silence. These processes were adhered to within work contexts in which young people did not feel safe as queer employees, including highly masculinised territories and fields of work with children and young people. Undertaking these processes constituted an additional form of labour for young queer people on top of their regular labour as paid employees. However, not all participants felt constrained by these regulatory processes; some young people, like Powderoo, had chosen to ignore the critical gaze of others in the workplace or to break silence about their sexuality in spite of their concerns. This suggests that as a regulatory space the workplace can function as an enabling as well as a constraining environment.

Core theme four: The workplace as a silencing space

Silence was a pervasive theme throughout participants’ accounts of work-life. This was especially so when participating in sexually exclusive workspaces and when seeking to obscure queer sexualities from visibility, as discussed in the previous discussion of bodywork. In this study, nineteen (19) young people expressed their apprehension about breaking silence and speaking about queer sexualities in the workplace. In this sense, the workplace was also constituted as a silencing space. However, silence was experienced as more than just a protective state. The intention of this core theme is to examine closely how silence was experienced in the workplace by young queer workers. Silence was not spoken about as a monolithic entity; silence was described in multiple ways. In this theme, I elaborate on the three states of silence prominent in participants’ stories: i) silence as an intimately shared state; ii) silence as an ambiguous state; and iii) silence

as an inescapable state. Furthermore, I demonstrate that while silence holds suppressive functions in preventing discussion about queer sexualities, it can also be experienced as facilitating in its effects.

i) Silence as an intimately shared state

Silence was experienced as an intimately shared state. This sub-theme focuses on participants' experiences of negotiating intimate relationships with other staff members in the same workplace—the labour of negotiating intimate relationships at work. While the formation of sexual relationships with colleagues is by no means unique to young queer lives alone, these young people were faced with the additional stressor of negotiating intimate relationships under the cloak of silence. Six (6) young people discussed negotiating same-sex relationships within the precincts of their former workplaces. For four (4) of these participants, their relationships had revolved around the maintenance of secrecy and silence, what Kat poignantly described as 'loving in the shadows'. This entailed an intense process of maintaining the relationship whilst ensuring its concealment during the course of their regular working day. In many ways, the maintenance of silence surrounding same-sex relationships was a protective measure. More specifically, it was a protective state shared between two parties in the same workplace, which brought with it new anxieties under the veil of secrecy.

Negotiating relationships with a co-worker had its own set of challenges as well as bringing new excitements and pleasures into young people's sexual lives. Maree's girlfriend expected her to protect their sexual privacy while they were both employed in the same department store. Consequentially, Maree felt restrained from discussing this relationship with her workmates and it prevented her from seeking out support during troubled times:

Maree – I was more than happy to tell everyone that I saw, like it wasn't a problem for me but I think it was that level of secrecy that made it really difficult, particularly when we were having problems in the relationship and there were quite a few times when I was sort of umm not really feeling like there was anyone for me to talk to about those things... but I just knew that would be it if I talked to anyone else, she would not forgive that... so yeah, that was really tough.

Maintaining intimate relationships in secrecy was emotionally hard work. Kat described her anguish in having to negotiate a complex same-sex relationship with her supervisor. It was a daunting challenge for Kat to keep her feelings to herself while having to witness other co-workers sympathise with her lover's more 'public' relationship:

Kat – It was hell! Not only was my lover my supervisor and therefore actually my boss (which was also exciting) but she was having a public relationship with one of the guys we worked with (she was his boss too)... Everything that happened between them everyone knew and would comment on! They'd be supportive of her and some of him. I had to keep it [same-sex relationship] secret, keep my feelings and my anguish to myself while I heard all about them knowing she'd be at my house that afternoon or that night telling me all about it, telling me she didn't know what she wanted from me, that she was confused and all the while kissing me again and again while my heart screamed that this couldn't be wrong. Now I knew that if I came out I'd lose her.

Part of Kat's distress in this story was compounded by having to quietly listen to the collective staff commentary about her lover's other relationship. This was in stark contrast to her relationship with her supervisor in which there is no acknowledgment from other staff.

Maintaining same-sex relationships in secrecy required elaborate measures. This was evident in Luke's story of negotiating a relationship with another lifesaver. Anxieties

about their new relationship becoming common knowledge prevented Luke and his boyfriend from discussing or expressing their relationship during work time. Consequently, the two lifesavers met only at night-time in the safety of the neighbouring city, never acknowledged their relationship when socialising with other co-workers and never displayed affection towards each other while at work. These were demanding conditions for a new relationship between two young people in their late teens:

Luke – But it was hard because I'm a very open person, and even now I find that being gay, that I'm proud of being gay so like I don't really want to hide it but I respected what he [boyfriend] wanted ... he hadn't really been in a relationship or anything like that, so it was his first experience in like a gay relationship... so it was probably hard for him because he was a bit scared too, like I was still scared about people finding out and stuff like that, but we'd catch-up at night like meet up in the city or meet on the train or something like that.

As relationships changed over time, so did each partner's requirement for privacy; these changes generated new frictions in young people's relationships. Ingrid felt like she was on the back foot when her ex-girlfriend, who was employed in the same department store, had suddenly decided to speak out about their relationship:

Ingrid – And so we [girlfriend and I] started working at the same time, trained together, working in the same department then broke-up and still working in the same department and then it became general knowledge, generally because [the ex-girlfriend] was having a bad day and she mentioned it to someone or brought it up, and while I didn't care it still put me on the back foot because I didn't know how people were going to react...

The shrouding of same-sex relationships in secrecy and silence can also be interpreted as a fortuitous state for negotiating sexual relationships without bringing unwelcome attention or intervention. Luke and his boyfriend, for example, continued to pursue their

secret relationship in spite of their fears about the relationship (and their sexuality) becoming common knowledge. If this relationship had become common knowledge, it may have been extremely difficult to maintain under the critical eyes of other team members. Similarly in Kat's story, if her relationship with a senior member of staff had become common knowledge this could have had detrimental consequences for both their relationship and their ongoing employment. Therefore, silence can also be experienced as a facilitating state albeit under highly restricted conditions.

ii) Silence as an ambiguous state

Some young people described how they had presented themselves as sexually ambiguous in the workplace, neither disclosing nor denying the assumptions of others about their sexual identity. Within these stories, silence was encapsulated as an ambiguous state. There was a degree of safety in not dispelling the potentially 'queered' assumptions of other co-workers while not feeling obligated to discuss queer sexualities at work. In these stories, sexuality was not something that was discussed or named but non-verbally signified, performed and displayed.

Six young people (6) discussed the bodily and aesthetic signifiers, such as mannerisms, clothing and hairstyles, which they believed signalled queer identities to other work colleagues. Moskoe explained how he signalled his 'gay' sexuality through his mannerisms and speech; he believed that it was obvious to others in his workplace that he was 'gay':

Moskoe – ... um probably the way I walk, the way I talk, the way I say things or certain words I use can be pretty obvious to people, my friends would tell me if something was overtly obvious, they'd go 'God, that's so gay!' but in a positive sense [laughs].

However, not all workplace audiences interpreted young people's actions as distinctly 'queer', illustrating the ambiguity (and potential safety) of relying on the sexual assumptions of others. In spite of his 'gayed' mannerisms and intonation, this had not prevented an older co-worker from presuming Moskoe was 'straight':

Moskoe – We've had a woman here [at work] who's say forty-seven, for example, she didn't pick up on my gesticulations and mannerisms and stereotypical gay mannerisms and so I went out for dinner for Valentine's Day, and she said something about in front of everyone, 'Well have fun with your girl!' or something like that, and everyone was sort of looking round the table, because we were at a big long dinner table, thinking 'She doesn't get it!' but generally everyone knows or gets it.

The significant factor for this group of young people was the potential for their self-presentation to be interpreted as queer and feeling like they were not concealing an integral aspect of the sexual self and their identity. Further, there was no explicit requirement to publicly discuss their sexuality and face the potentially homonegative responses of others.

Queer sexualities were displayed through outward appearance and apparel. Three (3) young women and one (1) young man described how they signalled queer sexualities through distinctive hairstyles and chosen work apparel. This relied on the assumption that other employees would interpret their appearance as 'non-heterosexual'. Kristy believed that her new hairstyle might have been interpreted as a 'gay' signifier by her former co-workers:

Kristy – When I started seeing my first girlfriend, I began to identify as gay. I don't think I ever said anything about it at work—I cut my hair short and started to look a little more like the person I had inside me... I don't think that anybody would have had a problem. I still know them and see them around and they all still like me.

Sexuality was displayed and performed within work- and customer-relationships. While Chester may not have discussed his sexuality at work, he described how he ‘displayed’ his sexuality through flirtatious behaviour with customers over the phone and in conversation with ‘the girls’ (women co-workers). For Chester, his sexuality was ‘displayed’ through a process of ‘using it’ in the course of his work:

Chester – So I guess at times I’ve probably relaxed and let my more camp-side come out, you know, maybe flirted with a customer or something like that, I mean not actually discussed sexuality with a customer but flirted with them or sometimes even without doing that I’ve had of couple of them flirt with me, I guess... So I don’t know whether you’d not so much discuss sexuality but display it, I suppose, using it.

Within these accounts, young people present, signify or display their sexuality; sexuality has performative aspects but it is not something that is explicitly named. This provides a limited degree of protection from any hostile or unfavourable responses, potential responses that always overshadow the naming of queer sexualities.

iii) Silence as an inescapable state

Six (6) participants’ stories depicted silence as an inescapable state: while participants may have ‘come out’ in the workplace this did not necessarily remove them from the recurring confines of the closet. In this sub-theme, young people either attempted to ‘come out’ or were ‘outed’ by others at work. On occasion, recipients of this information chose not to respond or responded with minimal acknowledgment. In this sense, other staff members tried to prevent or minimise any further discussion about queer sexualities. This was sometimes a disconcerting experience for participants because they did not know how to interpret the silence of others. For other participants it was a preferred state, as they did not have to continue discussions about their sexuality in any further depth.

On two occasions, participants were 'outed' in work-groups and then later thrust back into invisibility when greeted by silence from other employees. Responding with silence can be a powerful way of rendering queer lives invisible, leaving the queer speaker in an agonising space of not knowing how they are perceived by others. For example, Jack described the 'thick air' present in his interactions with the other kitchen staff after he had been 'outed' at a staff-barbecue the previous week. This unforeseen event created difficulties for Jack in sustaining rapport with his co-workers in the restaurant kitchen:

Jack – ... I noticed that the week after they [kitchen staff] were a bit kind of– I don't know [pause] more stilted, like you'd have a conversation it was kind of a stilted or a difficult conversation as if they and I didn't really know [pause] I don't know, it was just that sort of really thick air between me and the guys but, you know, there were never any problems, there were never any negative sentiment towards me.

For other young people, being greeted by silence was a disconcerting experience after they had made the effort to discuss their sexuality. For example, Bruce was unable to ascertain how he was perceived by other members of his all-male work-team after discussing his sexuality:

Bruce says: One of the graduates I was talking to at lunch was talking about how he will be moving to Fiji to work (the same organisation). Then I said that I wouldn't move there and explained about what happen to that Australian guy who was arrested and put in prison for having consensual sex with another man. After I mentioned it, they were just silent, and then the conversation changed. I wasn't sure what to think – maybe they were afraid to express their personal views... Well, I wondered what they thought of me being gay.

Recurring silences were sometimes preferred. After Moskoe's office manager knew he was 'gay', neither party chose to speak about this again. This was a preferable arrangement to what Moskoe considered a good working relationship:

Moskoe – Good, yeah it was very much a working relationship, he [manager] would um just... he knew I was gay and he wouldn't say like 'my girlfriend', he'd work his way around it as a lot of people do but he was more interested in me working, which was what I wanted, it was exactly what I wanted, yep.

Regardless of silence being experienced as a disquieting or a preferred state, these accounts illustrate how 'coming out' does not necessarily dispel sexual silence. On the contrary, disclosure can consolidate silence as an inescapable state.

Summary

Silence operated as more than a protective measure in the workplace. In their accounts, participants experienced multiple states of silence surrounding the expression and signification of queer sexualities. Similarly, silence served several functions in young peoples' work-lives. Silence functioned as both a protective and facilitating state for negotiating same-sex relationships in secrecy; this could also be a tense and highly fractious state for intimate couples to share together. Silence permitted some young people to signify or display their sexual identity through non-verbal methods within a degree of safety and without having to discuss explicitly their sexuality. Silence also functioned as an inescapable state that could not be easily dispelled through the disclosure of queer sexualities, whether through 'coming out' or being 'outed' by others. In these instances, 'coming out' consolidated the presence of silence.

Core theme five: Managing the unmanageable—sexual disclosure in the workplace

In this core theme, I focus on the methods by which participants attempted to dispel sexual silence in the workplace. The purpose of this core is to demonstrate how ‘coming out’, the process of self-disclosure, can be an unpredictable and erratic process to manage in work-relationships, no matter how prepared young queer people may feel. Participants elaborated at length on the numerous ways in which they disclosed their sexuality in the workplace. The disclosure process revolved around a series of critical decisions such as the selection of appropriate audiences and individual confidants in the workplace and the consideration of approaches to disclosure. These decisions were driven by wider cultural imperatives to ‘come out’ and present one’s sexual self to others. Despite their considered attempts, participants received a range of responses that brought both affirmation and further anguish. Furthermore, the disclosure process was sometimes removed from participants’ control through organisational gossip or through the decisions of others to speak on their behalf.

i) The ‘coming out’ imperative

The symbolic trope of ‘coming out’ and the significance of being ‘out’ in the workplace were repeatedly referred to throughout participants’ accounts of disclosing queer sexualities in the workplace. Participants made numerous references to ‘coming out’, being ‘closeted’ or being ‘out’ in their places of employment and often spoke of a dichotomous relationship between being ‘in’ or ‘out’, alluding to the metaphor of the closet. Allusions to ‘coming out’ were frequently expressed in tandem with developmental processes of ‘realising’, ‘working out’, and ‘discovering’ one’s sexuality, indicating essentialist understandings of sexuality as an innate aspect of their self and identity:

Trent – I think an advantage of being gay isn't as such as actually being gay, but the whole process of coming out and discovering myself has given me an inner strength I can use in work that others may not have.

Simultaneously participants referred to honesty as a moral attribute that was assigned to their decision-making in 'coming out'. Emphasis was given to the importance of 'being honest' or 'telling the truth' about one's sexuality in work-relationships. Connected to this need for honesty was the assumption of what one participant referred to as letting '...who I am on the inside out for everyone to know'. For example, Madeleine believed that being 'out' and 'honest' was integral to building personal relationships, including work-relationships:

Madeleine – I also find that with any relationship (e.g. friends at uni/work), coming out shows that I trust the person, so it often improves the friendship... they feel flattered that I am being open and honest with them, and so perhaps they will reciprocate this openness and honesty, and it leads to a deeper friendship.

To be dishonest about one's sexuality was often perceived as discrediting to young people's character: '...because to do anything else is to lie to yourself'. Regardless of their reasoning, several participants had expressed feelings of guilt and shame over their decisions to not 'come out' at work. For example, Nadi felt 'guilty' in choosing not to discuss her sexuality with adolescent clients, while Alexis felt like she had a 'dreaded dirty secret' inside of her because she had chosen not to discuss her same-sex partner with other staff members. Ruby expressed her sense of shame in electing not to discuss her sexuality during her employment as a carer in the disability field. This decision clashed with Ruby's political values of being 'out and proud': 'I felt hypocritical too because I was an advocate for queer rights and think that part of queer liberation is visibility and part of that visibility or the major concept of that visibility is being out and proud.'

ii) Doing disclosure in the workplace

The majority of participants had spoken to at least one person in their workplace about their sexuality; only three (3) participants had not spoken to anyone at work. Participants disclosed to various people across their work environments, from a few select workmates through to the majority of staff. Twenty-three (23) young people discussed the deliberation they had given to a) who they would speak to in the workplace and b) how they would approach disclosure in the workplace. Again, the level of thought given to these two processes was about staying safe—protecting established work-relationships from breaking down, protecting one’s job-security, and maintaining personal safety at work. This highlights that sexual disclosure was not a spontaneous or erratic decision but a carefully considered process for many young people in this study. However, not all young people had complete control over their process as other employees sometimes assumed authority to speak on their behalf.

a) Selecting confidants and audiences

The process of selecting audiences in the workplace was the first phase in thinking through a safe approach for ‘coming out’ at work. Participants had spoken to a wide range of audiences about their sexuality including members of management, co-workers and service recipients. Participants were at the same time selective about whom they spoke to. These select individuals frequently played the role of confidants.

Confidants included workmates whom participants socialised with outside of work, people who were considered trustworthy and in whom participants felt confident in receiving a supportive response. While work-based confidants varied in age, the majority of people were typically older. Confidants were frequently chosen based on their expression of liberal values, or for what Mia discussed as being ‘open-minded’: ‘As I said I’m into talking about political issues. I guess when I can ascertain that ppl [people] are fairly liberal minded its all good from there.’ Mia believed she would receive an affirming response from several youth workers employed in the same council service.

This assumption was founded on signifiers, such as lesbian and gay-friendly posters displayed on office walls that indicated supportive attitudes towards sexual diversity.

Several participants waited until they had time to assess and predict the response of others to a potential disclosure. Jacob had waited until queer-related issues had come up in conversations before speaking about his own queer desires to members of his research team. Tegan had subtly tested her co-workers by 'dropping hints in passing conversation' as a means of assessing potential confidants. Ingrid at this point in her working life had learnt to 'play dumb' in her work interactions, in which she strategically waited to hear the viewpoints of others before referring to her own sexuality.

Other workers who had spoken in an affirming manner about their relationships with queer family members and friends were considered good candidates for disclosure. Discussing her same-sex relationship had been an easy process for Bubbles once she had grown confident in her small team of workmates. This small group had spent late nights working together in a Turkish takeaway discussing their diverse relationships and attractions. These discussions signalled to Bubbles that she was amongst accepting company and that her sexual relationships were no less extraordinary than any other employees.

On some occasions, confidants selected themselves by inviting participants to speak about their sexuality, for example, by asking respectful questions about their relationships outside of work. These questions and comments were commonly interpreted by young people as indicating permission for them to speak safely about their sexuality. At a staff party, one of Luke's colleagues cajoled him into discussing his sexuality. Luke hesitantly obliged because he felt comfortable with this group of co-workers:

Luke – And one of them actually, my co-workers, actually asked me, she actually asked me at one of the staff parties if I was gay [smiles] and I was like, um I said ‘Aw I don’t really know, I might be!’ and then she said ‘Oh come on Luke, this is like the twenty-first century you know! Its alright—you can just tell me!’, and because I felt so comfortable working with those people I suppose I was a bit more of myself, like I was a bit more relaxed...

After identifying a suitable audience, participants exercised several methods of disclosure.

b) Methods of disclosure

Participants deployed a number of methods for speaking about their sexuality in the workplace. These moments of ‘coming out’ were often the first time participants had communicated their sexuality to others at work. While it was preferred to undertake this process of disclosure on one’s own terms, some young people did not always have full control over this process; sometimes other people assumed control on their behalf. Likewise, not all methods of disclosure ran according to plan.

Referring to or mentioning a same-sex partner’s gender or gender-specific name was a popular means of signalling queer sexualities to others, as discussed by eight (8) young people. For example, Shirley had dropped ‘glib remarks’ about living with another woman and had brought her new girlfriend to a social function:

Shirley – I had a work-do and I invited this woman along to the work-do, sort of at the end of it so we could go out afterwards and I was saying to my boss ‘Look, I’m going to be meeting someone later’ and his question was ‘Who is he?’ I said ‘Well [pause] I’m not meeting a man’, and he was like ‘Are you meeting a woman?’ and he was really quite ‘Oh-ok’ and then that was it, that was the end of it, nobody ever said anything else...

While most participants took their time in selecting and approaching confidants, Bruce had leapt straight on in with his new co-workers during his first day working at a bank firm. Bruce had not held back in sharing a proud moment in his 'gay' life and subsequently this disclosure gave permission for another young woman in the team to later approach him and discuss her sexuality:

Bruce – When I first started working for the organisation in the call centre, on the first day we were all asked to share a moment in our lives that made us feel really proud. So I [told] everyone about marching into the opening ceremony at the Gay Games as a competitor. I made some friends in the team, and we chatted about our private lives quite a bit. I would talk to them about my experiences with dating guys, and later one of my female friends (who I now live with) came to me to ask about places she could go to meet other girls...

Speaking about queer sexualities often occurred under certain conditions that were conducive to 'coming out'. For instance, Bubbles found it easier to mention her same-sex relationships to individual staff members during one-to-one interactions instead of addressing a group audience. She believed it was easier to respond to one person as opposed to having to respond to several people at the same time.

Despite careful consideration, not all moments of disclosure ran according to plan. This was a hard lesson for Kheva after he had 'come out' to several Year 10 students he had been working with as the school's IT officer:

Kheva – I only told a few select students but obviously, that didn't work, I should have thought that through a bit more [laughs] 'Don't tell anyone!'—'Promise!' So I come back from getting a piece of paper from the printer and everyone knows. But that didn't really bother me; initially some of the Grade 10 boys were all like 'fag!' and stuff like that but they soon got over it.

Regardless of their preparation, some young people felt like they had very little control over this process. Three (3) participants shared their experiences of disclosure while under the influence of alcohol at social functions:

Shirley – From there I went to work in a financial company [pause] I never made mention of it [sexuality] until one night when I got really drunk on a bottle of tequila and I didn't remember telling them [co-workers] and then the next day they were all whispering and giggling, and I said 'What?' and they all went 'Last night you told us this...' and I thought about it and went ah crap—'Yes I am, and I'm fine with it!' [angrily] and they were like 'Oh, ok' and that was it.

While there were no regrets expressed about 'coming out' while drinking (indeed, it was sometimes considered to be useful in reducing inhibitions), there were concerns about the potential repercussions. For example, as mentioned above, Shirley had to later deal with the titillating excitement of her co-workers in acquiring this information.

On some occasions, other employees assumed authority in disseminating this knowledge about young people's sexual lives. Five (5) young people recounted their experiences of being 'outed' by other staff members in which their sexuality was disclosed and discussed at work without their consent. The majority of participants 'outed' did not interpret this experience as an intentionally malicious act. Nevertheless, it could still be a disconcerting experience to lose control over this process of information-sharing. It had been a harrowing experience for Jack when his drunken co-worker had publicly proclaimed his sexuality during a staff-barbecue:

Jack – And then one of the women that I worked with has a got a friggin' huge mouth because we had a BBQ, like a staff-do thing and all the chefs and everyone was there and she was like 'Oh my god! Jack you're gay, I'm so happy!' and I'm like 'Oh, for fuck's sake!' [laughs]... I was half-pissed at the time so I just thought 'Oh whatever!' But one of my other friends actually stood up for me and she said 'Shut the fuck-up, [Sally]!' and she really supported me at that time, she just said 'Look don't worry about it, you're fine'. But no, I felt scared when she [Sally] started to scream it from the rooftops as you would but it was ok though um...

This instance of public disclosure did not have dire consequences for Jack. However, he was not to know this until after the event had occurred. This did not diminish the fear Jack felt at the time as his control over this process was compromised by the presumed authority of other people to speak on his behalf. In this sense, it was not 'ok'. This story reinforces how important it was for many young people in this study to have control over the process of 'coming out' at work.

iii) Responses to disclosure: An unpredictable process

Participants received a wide range of responses to their disclosure, from supportive to dismissive to betrayal, marking sexual disclosure as an unpredictable process in the workplace. How individual confidants and collective audiences chose to respond to young people's sexual disclosure played a powerful role in determining participants' future patterns of work interaction. For instance, if a dismissive or critical response was received participants were more likely to stay silent in the future. Conversely, if a supportive response was received participants were likely to feel relieved and subsequently valued in their work-relationships. This affirmed their choices to speak 'out'.

Four (4) young people (Madeleine, Maree, Powderoo and Ingrid) had been greeted by responses of shock and surprise by some of their co-workers, suggesting that they had

never considered that their colleague was non-heterosexual. During her time working for a department store, Powderoo perceived herself as separate from other staff. This social distance was accentuated when Powderoo received shocked responses from co-workers about her sexuality: ‘... it was more like the fact that they were shocked that I was [a lesbian], that’s the impression that I got from them but they didn’t really talk about it.’

As previously discussed, some young people were greeted by silence post-disclosure. Other young people were greeted with responses of betrayal. When two (2) participants (Maree and Chester) did ‘come out’ to their respective colleagues they were greeted by pained or hurt expressions for not disclosing this information earlier, inducing a sense of culpability. When Maree had spoken to her former workmates at the department store about her same-sex relationship she had received a hostile response from two particular friends:

Maree – ...I guess after some period of time I did start to admit it to a few people, umm just a few people that we were really close to. But yeah, no one really reacted in a very positive way at that time... it was almost like some of our friends felt sort of betrayed by it, I don’t know, it was just sort of like ‘I don’t know who you are anymore’... just going ‘Oh my god, this is so horrible, and it’s affecting us!’ and we just couldn’t understand what was going on at that time, they were really hostile.

‘Coming out’ was a catch-22 scenario for these two young people in which they felt guilty about not being ‘out’ in their workmate relationships and then, post-disclosure, were made to feel guilty because they were not ‘out’ earlier.

It was sometimes a relief for participants to discuss their sexuality for the first time with others at work; it was not the act of disclosure but the responses of others that brought relief. Ingrid had felt relieved after the first occasion she had mentioned her same-sex relationship to the principal of the school where she was teaching. Taking this action dispelled her fears of differential treatment: ‘Again it was relief, it’s always relief when I’ve done the coming out thing or when its first come up, and I desperately don’t want it to become an awkward thing...’

Many young people had received responses of support and affirmation from both colleagues and managers, as described by Madeleine. While attending a social function after work, Madeleine had decided to ‘come out’ to her co-workers and boss, and consequentially received supportive responses:

Madeleine says: I came out to everyone after a few months—the first time we had a social thing after work... Well, I knew my boss was bi [sexual], so I knew it would be okay. One other staff member was a bit funny. One was impressed. But when you're in a predominantly accepting environment, it's the homophobic person who is made to feel uncomfortable, rather than me.

In this scenario, Madeleine feels supported in three ways: through the positive responses of her workmates, the affirmation of knowing about her boss’s bisexual identity and the exclusion of a colleague who appeared uncomfortable upon receiving this information.

iv) The (in)convenience of workplace gossip

Participants perceived gossip in the workplace as both a concern and a convenience. It was described as an inevitable process of information sharing in the workplace, often without young people’s consent. However, workplace gossip was more than a process of information sharing; it symbolised a situated process of knowledge construction about the sexual identities of participants. The spread of gossip became a new fountain of organisational knowledge about young queer people’s sexual subjectivity.

For some participants workplace gossip symbolised an anxiety-ridden process of losing control over potentially stigmatising information. Four (4) young people (Nadi, Sam, Nick and Luke) raised their concerns about what they considered the potential risks attached to gossip. This varied from the fear of small town gossip within the location of their workplace to concerns for being mis-perceived as a sexual threat. For instance, Nadi was worried that if she were ‘out’ in her workplace at an all-girls boarding school

student gossip would travel back to concerned parents. Consequently, she would be identified as a 'risk' to student wellbeing. This concern was based on previously witnessing the vilification of another female staff member because of her sexuality within the same school:

Nadi – I think I would have been talked about behind my back, similar to the bus driver [former staff member] I mentioned, and left out by the other staff, some of the students would have felt uncomfortable with me, and at worst, a parent might have made a complaint... The parents were a definite no as they would be most likely to kick up a fuss if they didn't like me being around their daughters, and I wouldn't tell the students, because teenage girls tend to gossip...

Sometimes the spread of gossip in the workplace was anticipated and accepted as an inevitable aspect of organisational life. This was discussed by four (4) young people (Trent, Chester, Pearson and Moskoe). Knowing about the sexual lives of others was a 'hot' topic for discussion at work. As stated by Trent: '...word gets around, somehow it makes good gossip'. Pearson was employed as an airline attendant for an international airline. Within this industry of service work, discussing sex and relationships amongst the crew was an established norm: 'There's very little that is taboo amongst the staff, its generally very gossipy and stuff, so it would be very regular that sexualities get discussed in an often graphic manner!'

Three (3) young people (Ingrid, Moskoe and Kheva) considered workplace gossip a convenient process that had relieved them of the responsibility of sexual disclosure. Moskoe identified gossip as an advantageous process that prevented him from having to speak to staff individually. Soon after commencing employment as an administration officer, Moskoe had relied upon the handy services of the local office gossiper for informing others on his behalf:

Moskoe – ...so I just said to one of them, to the finance woman here who does all the gossiping and all that business, and made it quite clear, planted the seed with her and then she spread it around, so I knew it would happen, I just said ‘No, no [boyfriend’s name] is a guy!’ and then just took-off for the weekend, and knew by Monday that everyone would know, and it was a lot easier doing it that way then, you know, going round telling everyone.

Summary

This theme demonstrates that while ‘coming out’ in the workplace can be approached as a carefully considered process it can also be an unpredictable process that defies straightforward management. This sense of unpredictability can be further exacerbated by the spread of workplace gossip. Disclosing queer sexualities and responding to sexual disclosure are two powerfully defining moments in which recipients of this information formulate new perceptions about the sexual subjectivity of young queer people or confirm their previously held assumptions. Hence, the process of sexual disclosure can be an extremely vulnerable moment for young employees to initiate in the confines of their workplace. This level of vulnerability is heightened when other clients and co-workers assume control over this process or when unable to predict the responses of others. Conversely, young people are not powerless or unprepared in these definitive moments. Young people in this study articulated considered choices about selecting confidants they desired to share this knowledge with and the methods by which they sought to convey their sexuality in a safe fashion.

Concluding comments to the chapter

This concludes the second findings chapter in which I have presented three further core themes examining how young queer people experience the workplace as paid workers. Within these core themes, participants experienced the workplace as a regulatory and as a silencing space.

Working in regulatory spaces held both constraining and enabling effects. In the previous chapter, I recounted the strategies by which participants resisted and refuted homonegative expressions and beliefs, arguing that the experience of sexually exclusive environments and homonegative practices can incite counter-resistance. In this chapter, I discussed how the experience and anticipation of homonegativity in the workplace had a governing effect on participants' actions, self-presentation and speech; this is demonstrated through the series of self-regulatory practices, the processes of bodywork, adhered to by participants in the course of their daily work. However, participants did not always adhere to these self-regulatory processes; this was evident at various points through their defiance of the judgemental gaze of other staff or through breaking silence about their sexuality. In this sense, regulatory workspaces were sometimes experienced as enabling environments through defying invitations into concealing queer sexualities.

Within the second core theme, young queer people did not experience silence as a singular dimension. Within participants' stories, silence had many facets and meanings. Accordingly, silence served dual functions that were facilitating as well as suppressive. Despite its pervasiveness, silence was not experienced as a completely suppressive force. Silence did not prevent some participants from forming intimate relationships with other staff members; on the contrary, secrecy was useful in cloaking these relationships from common knowledge. Furthermore, silence did not prevent the majority of participants from disclosing their sexuality to at least one other worker. However, disclosure at work was not an always easy or affirming process. Negotiating contingencies such as the unpredictability of confidant's responses and the inevitable spread of workplace gossip highlights that sexual disclosure in the workplace is an arduous process that defies simple management. The following chapter concludes the presentation of findings by

focusing on an alternative representation of the workplace as an inclusive and sexually diverse space.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Experiencing the workplace as an inclusive space and a sexually diverse space

Introduction to the chapter

This chapter charts the final set of accounts of young people's experience of the workplace as queer employees. Workplaces were not always experienced as sexually exclusive, regulatory or silencing spaces and neither was the workplace always perceived as a primarily heterosexual space, as depicted in the previous two chapters. The workplace also operated as a site of acceptance, inclusion and validation. Participants' accounts incorporated numerous descriptions of affirming, supportive and mutually respectful relationships shared with other employees and members of management. This included critical reflections on the benefits and costs of working alongside queer colleagues; these reflections sometimes trouble common perceptions of 'lesbian' and 'gay' identities as a source of support and unity.

The purpose of this third findings chapter is to present the two remaining core themes and demonstrate how the workplace can operate as an inclusive and sexually diverse space. Table 8 presents a summary of the remaining two core themes and respective sub-themes. The first core theme discusses the critical aspects identified by participants through which workplaces were experienced as inclusive spaces. Inclusive cultures evolved chiefly from their firsthand experiences of supportive, validating and respectful relationships with other staff members, including members of management. Workplace policies and practices were not a significant contributor to inclusive workplaces; alternatively, participants identified a series of informal micro-practices expressed by other staff, which made them feel included as queer employees.

The second core theme focuses on how participants experienced the workplace as a sexually diverse space in which they were not the only queer workers. Within this theme, I examine how participants negotiated work-relationships with queer colleagues that

were experienced as sources of both connection and division. These accounts trouble preconceived notions of collective cohesion amongst non-heterosexual employees in the workplace. This theme also brings attention to the ways in which queer-majority workplaces had both inclusive and exclusive effects on the participation of young queer workers.

Table 8

Summary of the two core themes and related sub-themes presented in this chapter

Core themes	Sub-themes
Core theme six: The workplace as an inclusive space	i) The symbolism of supportive relationships ii) Micro-practices of inclusion iii) Participating in inclusive work cultures iv) The insignificance of workplace policy and procedure
Core theme seven: The workplace as a sexually diverse space	i) Connecting with queer colleagues ii) Differences and divisions between queer colleagues iii) Experiences of inclusion and exclusion within queer-majority workplaces

Core theme six: The workplace as an inclusive space

This core theme examines what participants discussed as inclusive workplaces: spaces in which young people felt included, supported and valued as queer employees. These accounts bring reassurance that not all workplaces were experienced as sexually exclusive, silencing or regulatory spaces and effectively illustrate how workplaces can operate as socially diverse spaces in which inclusive relationships are sustained between employees. Within participants' accounts, inclusive workspaces were spread across a wide range of industries, from retail and sales settings to community and welfare-based organisations. Participants primarily perceived these workplaces as heterosexual-majority sites. However, in contrast to the previous themes, non-heterosexual identities and relationships were recognised and respected amongst staff.

There were a number of critical aspects to the experience of inclusive spaces. The first aspect entailed the provision of support from other staff members and within wider work-teams. These supportive relationships validated participants' status as queer employees. The second aspect included a number of informal micro-practices demonstrated by individual employees. The third aspect involved the collective values and perspectives shared within organisational cultures. In the eyes of participants, organisational policies and procedures were not a significant contributor to inclusive work environments.

i) The symbolism of supportive relationships

This sub-theme outlines the supportive relationships young queer people formed within their workplaces—the first aspect by which workplaces were experienced as inclusive spaces. The majority of participants (28) indicated that during the course of their work-lives they had shared supportive relationships with at least one other staff member, including members of management, colleagues and workmates. These were symbolically

meaningful relationships because they provided young queer workers with validation and knowledge that their sexuality was accepted and, in some cases, appreciated. Support and recognition was received from individuals as well as from participation in work-teams. While not all work cultures were experienced as safe or inclusive spaces, this did not remove the possibility of forming supportive relationships. Within this sub-theme, I first discuss what participants identified as significant factors in their supportive relationships shared with co-workers. I then recognise the ways in which members of management extended their support to young queer employees. Finally, I describe what participants cited as the key elements of supportive work-teams and elaborate on the effects of participating in supportive teams.

In their descriptions of supportive relationships shared with colleagues, participants identified a number of significant factors. These relationships were supportive in the sense that participants felt accepted as queer and equal employees. Supportive workmates were people that participants formed close ties with across differences in age and gender. Pearson and Chester identified two older women with whom they shared close friendships. Pearson described his friendship with an older female colleague: 'From the day I met her, we got along better than boy-employee... that just developed over time, helped along by helping each other with other personal things, like deaths, bad relatives etc'.

Trust was a significant factor for twelve (12) participants in their relationships with supportive co-workers. Kheva reflected on the trusting relationship he had formed with his workmate Shaun, a 'straight' guy who made him feel accepted as a 'gay-identifying' man:

Kheva – ... so you let it out [sexual disclosure] and then the gate comes up to block out anything that might come back negative and when it doesn't it– ... the gate just falls over and you think 'What's happened?!' and it feels really awkward, not a bad awkward obviously but yeah it's good. And that's why I have a much better relationship with [Shaun], like I feel like I can trust him more because he's instantly accepting, like there is not even a flicker of doubt when someone goes 'Oh, that's cool!'

Sometimes co-workers provided support in the face of adversity and the mutual recognition that young people were not experiencing abusive treatment in isolation. Michael appreciated the support of a workmate who shared his dislike for their 'abusive' department manager and validated his own perceptions of victimisation:

Michael – I did mention to one of my workmates and he had sort of the same problems with [male manager] and he also knew I was gay and was quite open with that and quite fine with that which was good... so that kind of validated my feelings, that kind of felt like well I'm not the only one that's had these experiences with this particular person.

As recounted in the previous two findings chapters, participants had experienced discriminatory and, on occasion, abusive relationships with members of management. These relationships consequently left them with mixed feelings, from feeling uncertain and confused through to feeling afraid and intimidated. In counter-balance to these stories, nine (9) young people acknowledged their appreciation for the supportive relationships they had shared with managers. Within these relationships, participants felt happy for their sexuality to be known by their managers. Indeed, two (2) young men (Moskoe & Kheva) expressed admiration for their managers as role models.

Supportive managers extended their support to young queer employees in a number of ways. Support was provided to young queer employees' experiencing personal difficulties in their day-to-day life, from mental health issues through to troubled relationships with same-sex partners. Jacob elaborated on how his boss had assisted him with his work at a point when he expected to receive a reprimand over his recent performance:

Jacob says: I had a particularly difficult period during that time, and my boss noticed a drop in my work performance, and me turning up late and leaving early. He hadn't known about my history with depression... When I told him, he was totally supportive. He gave me more of his time to supervise and guide me, and helped me set manageable goals to get me back on track, and somehow thru [through] all this, he increased my motivation and confidence.

Supportive managers were people who backed-up their younger queer staff members in harrowing situations. Pearson felt supported by members of middle management when having to deal with unpleasant and abusive passengers in his role as a flight attendant:

Pearson says: If any passenger was out of line, with any sort of comment to any hostey, management would back us to the hilt. Passengers absolutely do not tolerate it, and deal with most things right then and there, but if it goes further, yeah, we're supported.

Supportive relationships with management members made participants feel valued as employees. For instance, Kheva had received complimentary comments from his managers which bolstered his sense of feeling like a valuable employee: 'Yeah they keep telling me how lucky they are to have me there, and yeah it's nice to be spoken to like that [laughs], why would I want to leave when I'm being spoken to like that?'

Supportive relationships were also an integral aspect of working in teams. Fourteen (14) young people had participated in supportive work-teams that had enhanced their experiences of the workplace as an inclusive environment. Work-teams had numerous supportive elements. These were small groups in which cooperation and collaboration were valued, especially during times of high-stress and high-workload. Supportive teams were also groups that met together outside of work, where team-members were well acquainted with each other's personal lives. Several participants, including Bubbles,

Peggie, Kheva and Jacob, commented on their enjoyment of spending social time with workmates:

Bubbles – ... there was a lot of like downtime where we're just sitting around or hanging around after work, like after our shifts we'd go out and drink together. We'd hang out at the shop even when we weren't working. It was just like you'd sit there and talk with people who were working and get something to eat; it was a lot like having this big crazy family...

Supportive teams were groups in which young queer workers trusted their team members, felt valued, and enjoyed participating in these work-groups. Diego believed he was 'lucky' to be working with a group of 'nice' and 'caring' people at his most recent employment at the coffee shop. The emphasis given to feeling 'lucky' suggests that some young queer people such as Diego anticipate exclusionary treatment during their work-life. This expectation is disrupted when situated in supportive work-teams.

There were several notable effects from participating in supportive work-teams. For participants who had previously worked in abusive or discriminatory environments this contrast brought sharp relief and reassurance that not all workplaces were sexually exclusive spaces. Supportive work-teams sometimes provided validation to young people as queer workers; validation that was not received in other social settings such as the home. In this sense, the workplace played a vital role in affirming the sexual development of young queer people. For two (2) young men (Jacob and Diego), participating in supportive work-teams provided a temporary escape and healthy distance from estranged family relationships. When Diego was seventeen years old, it was a relief to be able to go to work as it brought him some respite from his father at home who he referred to as an 'angry person'. Diego described this time as 'almost like two different lives in a way', considering his co-workers at the nursery a supportive group of people whom he could talk to about sexuality-related issues that he could not talk about at home:

Diego – ... I was only seventeen or eighteen at the time so I didn't have anywhere really to go so if he [Dad] was to get really upset– [pause] but yeah, that kinda thing sorta, not willing or able to talk about it [sexuality] at all... I guess it was more of a relief going to work really, if you knew you had someone to talk to, you knew you had someone to talk to at work...

ii) Micro-practices of inclusion

Intrinsic to participants' accounts of inclusive workplaces were the subtle ways in which other staff members demonstrated attitudes of inclusion and respect towards young queer employees. These micro-practices were the second foundational aspect to inclusive workplaces. Participants described the spoken expressions and gestures by which other staff members, both co-workers and managers, made them feel included, appreciated and respected as queer staff members. These micro-practices provided the basis for sexually affirming relationships. In this sub-theme, I identify the five most distinct sets of micro-practices that made young people feel included.

The first set of micro-practices signalled appreciation towards young employees as queer workers. Four (4) participants (Kheva, Peggie, Powderoo and Nadi) noted the informal expressions of appreciation they had received from other staff members. From her most recent workplace at the car saleyard, Peggie shared her story of appearing in the local weekend media as part of a staged lesbian and gay protest. While feeling anxious about returning to work Monday morning, Peggie was relieved to be greeted by appreciative responses by her co-workers about her media appearance:

Peggie – ... Yeh, it was fine, everyone just said 'You were on the news!' or it was very warming and accepting and good. But I don't think they were really fazed by it, you know, if something was said they'd say 'Excuse me! Just because I've been on the news!' [laughing]... Yeh I was pretty anxious going to work on the Monday but no, it was relieving, surprised, and good, you know. Even the mechanics out the back said 'Congratulations!'

The second set of micro-practices involved witnessing co-workers and people in senior positions take a stand against homonegative expressions. This was evident in the stories of Madeleine and Kheva. Madeleine had witnessed her boss frequently speak out against ‘homophobic’ comments in her workplace at an out-of-school care centre. It was reassuring to know that a senior member of staff did not tolerate prejudice from service consumers, including children:

Madeleine says: I have a new boss and she is very anti-homophobic. More so than me, even... and she's said multiple times how she gets mad when people say homophobic things. And if any of the kids says something is “gay”, she always tells them off.

The third set of micro-practices entailed the use of inclusive language in day-to-day conversation. This stood out to Maree and Nadi as a significant indicator of inclusive and respectful attitudes, especially when other staff actively avoided the presumption of heterosexuality. Maree had noted the ways in which her new colleagues had used inclusive language during her first few weeks of employment at a counselling organisation:

Maree – The biggest thing I noticed I guess was when in the first few weeks of working there, was just in the way that people spoke about things and the language that was used, umm things like using the term ‘partner’ maybe as opposed to somebody coming up to me and saying ‘Do you have a boyfriend?’ or things like that. I think just in the language and in the general way that people sort of speak and engage with you it seems like there’s a level of comfort there that I haven’t experienced necessarily in other organisations.

The fourth set of micro-practices involved the inclusion of partners in workplace conversations and social functions. These inclusive gestures conveyed a sense of equality amongst staff. Six (6) young people discussed the significance of having their

partners included in social events and functions and general staff conversations. The inclusion of same-sex partners was not formalised in organisational policy or procedure but instead was extended through informal requests and invitations from co-workers and senior staff members. This was Shirley's current experience within her workplace at the call centre:

Shirley – And at work friends will always go 'How's [girlfriend] today?' and you know, it's a really nice recognition, or my boss goes if we're having some sort of event or social occasion where partners are invited 'Is [girlfriend] coming or does she have to work?' And that's really nice, that's just recognition that whoever you're with is a) welcome at these events but b) they don't sort of look at it too differently.

Similarly, Diego believed that his small team of co-workers at the coffee shop acknowledged and respected his relationship on equal terms:

Diego – At [coffee shop] I mean I guess it's like everybody, I think almost everybody at work has some sort of relationship, so I think it's kinda one of the things where everybody says 'Oh, we'd like to meet him or we'd like to meet her! Bring them in!'... They've asked me to bring him [boyfriend] in but we've also had some of the other people asked to 'Bring in your new boyfriend, or bring your new girlfriend in!'

The fifth set of micro-practices included the ways in which young people were not made to feel distinctly different because of their sexuality; these were everyday practices by which young queer people felt like equal employees. This was a noteworthy factor for three (3) young people (Shirley, Jacob and Diego). Within his research team at the hospital, Jacob had felt valued as an equal member by his team-members and supervisors; at no point did Jacob feel singled out as the only 'gay' team-member:

Jacob says: I felt that I was a valued team member just like the other ppl [people] in our group... but that's cos I never felt like a “gay guy” in the group. I never hid the fact that I was gay. My supervisors helped me a lot—work-related and personal issues. And my work colleagues also become part of my social circle of friends.

iii) Participating in inclusive work cultures

This sub-theme examines what seven (7) participants described as broader inclusive work cultures, focusing on the beliefs and perspectives that were collectively valued by the majority of staff. These cultures of inclusion were dependent on the kinds of people employed in the workplace and their collective valuing of sexual diversity. This was the third aspect by which workplaces were experienced as inclusive spaces. Participants emphasised several factors that contributed to wider inclusive cultures or what they often referred to as ‘good’ workplaces.

Participants identified inclusive work cultures as ‘good’ places in which they felt they could ‘be themselves’. Participating in these work cultures provided both permission and encouragement for young queer people to express and present their preferred sexual self. For Kristy this meant she could be ‘herself’ as a lesbian woman: ‘In my current workplace, being me is very easy :) [smiley face] I don't really have any trouble from anybody—they all know me and they know where I stand.’ Similarly, other young people referred to their workplaces as ‘open’ spaces in which it felt safe for their sexuality to be known amongst staff. This is evident in Peggie’s description of her workplace at the car saleyard: ‘It was a very open place; there were no secrets going on or anything, a good place’.

Another important consideration to what made a ‘good’ workplace was the level of receptiveness to social difference, as identified by Jack and Bubbles. Jack reflected on his former employment in an inner city restaurant. He described the workplace culture as ‘alternative’, and pointed to the welcoming attitude of his boss and other staff towards socially diverse diners and employees:

Jack – It was a good working environment to get into because it was quite an alternative environment... Alternative, not in the openly-accepting gay sense but more like in the quite an artsy-sense... But my boss he was great, he was really quite accepting, he had a lot of gay friends so there was never any sort of ill sentiment towards anybody who was different who worked in or came to the restaurant, that's what I mean by alternative, it welcomed everybody.

Other significant factors that constituted inclusive work cultures incorporated the type of industry. Three (3) young people commented on how their work in the human services and welfare industry attracted mostly 'non-judgemental' and 'friendly people'. These values and traits were in line with the requisite values and ethics for working within helping professions. As a counseling service, Maree's workplace was not only addressing how it could develop an inclusive and accessible environment for 'LGBT'-identifying people but how it could actively market itself to these communities. Part of this process involved owning responsibility for the failure to engage with queer communities in the past:

Maree – I think [my workplace] are very aware of all types of people—just very aware of diversity and very much aware of the need to be accessible to all different groups in the community and I feel like they're at a point now where they are realising that maybe in the past they haven't done enough to engage the LGBT community, and that's something they're really looking at focusing on in the next few years... And I think some of the things they have done at this point in time are things like advertising in the local gay press, umm they're looking at maybe getting involved with some education work at Pride [queer public event] and maybe even marching in the [Pride] march this year and things like that...

Maree had played a leading role in suggesting her organisation participate in these queer events, demonstrating the proactive role young employees can play in contributing to and investing in inclusive work cultures.

iv) The insignificance of workplace policy and procedure

Workplace policies and procedures on diversity management and social inclusion rarely featured in young people's accounts of what constituted an inclusive, and more explicitly, discrimination- and prejudice-free environment. Maree's workplace was the exception by formally seeking to raise its status as 'LGBT-friendly organisation' and by endorsing its inclusive stance within the service's resources and webpages.

Some participants had difficulty in recalling the sighting of policies and protocols that formally acknowledged diverse staff groups or prohibited sexuality-based discrimination and harassment. One participant reflected on how their large private employer had 'just the standard discrimination/equal opportunity stuff' but could not recall seeing any mention of sexuality and gender as sources of discrimination. Another participant believed their corporate workplace avoided mentioning discrimination issues by instead referring to a 'values-based' policy:

Shirley – They [employing company] call themselves a VBO, a Values Based Organisation—another acronym, an acronym for everything! Basically, they have a set of values that they like to encourage employees to use when interacting within the business... So that's how they get around not actually having some sort of statement about gender equality or no discrimination for sexual preference or anything like that.

When several participants did recall sighting anti-discrimination and equal opportunity (EO) policies that included references to sexual and gender discrimination, these were often dismissed as ineffectual and insignificant. Bruce and Michael commented on how ineffective these policies were, especially as they were rarely enforced and often given lip service within their respective organisations. Bruce had noted occasional written references to 'sexual diversity' in staff communications, however, believed that other staff did not take these memos seriously:

Bruce says: However, sexual diversity as well as disability diversity is a lot of time hesitantly mentioned in staff communications... like it's [sexuality] mentioned, but sometimes missed out, or included in a round-about way. It's like people are too embarrassed to include words such as 'disability' and 'sexuality' in staff communications. I have heard some staff laugh at the word 'sexuality' a few times. I've also heard other staff say that 'disability is not sexy'...

The observed reference to disabilities as 'not sexy' was particularly infuriating for Bruce as a gay man living with a visible disability; normative standards of sexuality and physicality were reiterated through the ridicule of non-normative bodies. Michael questioned the value of anti-harassment policies, which he believed had not been enforced during his employment at the department store:

Michael – ... [We] had all those policies, procedures, harassment things, and all those policies, but it comes down to what is the policy worth? It's one thing to for someone in the Head Office to write something on a piece of paper that says harassment is not tolerated, it's another thing for a person in that situation to go and mention it to someone... But all the policies were there but what they were was anybody's guess.

During her arduous employment at the men's clothing store, Peggie had witnessed a slight change in organisational policy on staff 'respect'. This was only after she had raised her concerns about bullying with the Human Resources Manager. However, in Peggie's opinion, this policy had no effect and it was not enforced after being signed by all staff:

Peggie – ... No nothing at all, like I said it was just [pause] just a signing off thing, you know, and that was about it. But I think that they're [male staff members] that think that the guys probably just thought that 'Well we've probably said to the other girl, the straight girl, too many crude comments'.

It appears that workplace policy and protocols contributed very little to participants' perceptions of what constitutes an inclusive workplace. Instead, participants gave considerably greater weight to informal practices of inclusion and meaningful relationships of support, equality and respect. These were essential aspects to the foundations of inclusive spaces.

Summary

From participants' accounts, the basis of inclusive workplaces depended on several aspects: supportive relationships shared with co-workers, manager and across work-teams; the informal micro-practices demonstrated by individuals; and the affirmative values and attitudes collectively shared within inclusive work cultures. It is equally important to note the requirements that were not discussed in detail; namely, the existence and effectiveness of formal organisational policy and procedure on social inclusion and diversity management. Essentially, this means that inclusive workspaces are reliant on the 'goodwill' and inclusive attitudes of individual employees and less so on formal policy and practice.

Core theme seven: The workplace as a sexually diverse space

Throughout their working lives, many participants had, at some point, worked with or in the same workplace as other identifiably non-heterosexual workers. In this sense, the workplace was experienced as a sexually diverse space in which heterosexuality was not the only visible sexuality. This set of stories illustrate that workplaces were not always experienced as isolating spaces in which participants were the ‘only gay’. Indeed, some young people were employed in queer-majority workplaces in which most staff members identified as non-heterosexual. In this core theme, I examine participants’ experiences of connecting with other queer employees as well as their astute perceptions of the differences and divisions between other queer staff members and themselves. Further, I discuss how sexually diverse spaces can operate as both inclusive and exclusive environments based on participants’ observations and experiences of differential treatment in queer-majority workplaces. Within this theme, sexually diverse spaces are not always experienced as inclusive or equitable work environments.

i) Connecting with queer colleagues

For some participants, participating in the workplace was a convenient means of connecting with other queer individuals. At some point in their work history, eleven (11) participants had struck friendships with queer co-workers, providing each other with empathetic support, and in some instances, a respected confidant. Connecting with queer colleagues gave young people a sense of reassurance and confidence, an opportunity to extend social networks, and a source of mutual support.

Knowing that other visibly queer employees were present in the workplace provided reassurance that it was okay to identify as non-heterosexual at work. Working alongside queer co-workers brought opportunities to witness these colleagues receive supportive responses from other staff; this in turn brought reassurance to young queer workers. For

example, Shirley felt far more confident in speaking about her sexuality in the workplace after witnessing another queer colleague be ‘accepted’:

Shirley – The next job was in a food court, and strangely enough, I ended up coming out at that work—it was more because I met a friend there, a lovely guy, we just clicked and it was wonderful... one day we were at a nightclub and this young man was in tears and I said ‘What’s wrong?’ and he goes ‘I just can’t meet anybody, you know, you might have guessed...’ ‘What, you think you’re gay?’ ‘I am gay!’ ‘Ah ok, that’s cool’, at that stage I thought of myself as bisexual... so that’s how I sort of brought it about. And everybody at work loved this guy, you could not love this guy, and because they accepted him it was a lot easier for me to say it, and they were all incredibly accepting...

Regardless of whether participants actually struck friendships with other queer employees, knowing there were other queer individuals in the same workplace and witnessing how these other people were respected, reassured them that they were in a safe work environment. This was discussed by two participants, Ingrid and Steven. Ingrid appreciated knowing that there were gay-identifying men working across other departments during her casual employment at the department store. This knowledge reassured her that there was always the possibility of speaking with another queer employee if she ever needed to:

Ingrid – ... I mean I didn’t have anything to do with them because I never worked in those areas but it was nice just to have a bit of a smile and a friendly face any old day of the week really. Just knowing that there were other people around if an issue ever came up... so yeah, I guess it was good just to know that there was someone else and if I really really needed to I could talk to someone that knew how it would feel.

For some young people, entering the workplace had been advantageous for meeting and connecting with other queer individuals; it provided the chance to build their ‘queer’

networks and friendships. For example, through his work Jack had met another gay waiter who provided an entry point into accessing local gay venues and a mate to accompany him out: ‘... we’d sort of formed a really good professional and personal relationship through work. And he introduced me to the gay scene in [city location] so socially after work we’d go out ...’

Sometimes, the opportunity to connect with other queer employees enabled the exchange of support in the workplace. Luke had welcomed the support of an older ‘gay’ mentor during his former experiences working in the labour-intensive industry of hospitality as a kitchen-hand. In retrospect, Luke believed this person ‘impacted on [his] life in a big way’:

Luke – ... He was a lot older than I was, and a really nice guy. I didn’t tell him that I was gay or anything, maybe he could tell or something, but like he sort of took me under his wing and helped me deal with the chefs and stuff like that... But he also made me feel like– [pause] like ever since then I really wanted to come out to all sorts of different people... he was a really fun person to work with and he wasn’t afraid to express himself or he didn’t mind that people knew that he was gay or whatever so it was an eye-opener in one way because it made me see that it’s alright to be gay.

Through their work-relationship, Luke learnt that it was ‘alright’ to be gay. This highlights how relationships in the workplace can provide a source of sexual validation and affirmation.

On occasions participants provided support to other queer employees when they were approached as trusted confidants, as evident above in Shirley’s story and as featured in Kheva’s story. Two older women, who were employed at the same manufacturing company, had approached Kheva as someone they could talk to in confidence about their sexuality. These two women did not feel as safe as Kheva in being identified as non-heterosexual at work:

Kheva – I felt honoured actually when they approached me and explained it to me and I sort of found it not funny in the sense as in ‘Ha-ha you’re gay too!’ but funny in the sense that ‘Oh wow I remember what that was like—I know what you’re going through and exactly how it feels and how even though you know I’m gay you’re still scared shitless telling me in case somebody else finds out or I tell someone’, I know what that was like when I first came out so I could tell them ‘Look I can appreciate, I know exactly what you’re going through—your secret’s safe with me’.

In this story, Kheva was puzzled as to why these two women felt they could not speak out in the same work environment in which he felt respected as a young gay man. Kheva attributed this difference in perceptions to age in which he believed it was distinctly harder for queer employees of an ‘older generation’ to be ‘out’. An alternative interpretation is based on intersecting differences in age and gender—identifying as a young gay man could be considerably more acceptable in this particular work culture than identifying as an older ‘lesbian’ woman. Being queer in the workplace does not automatically place non-heterosexual employees on equal standing. Other social differences, for example in age or gender, intersect and mutually shape individual experiences of work-relationships and cultures.

ii) Differences and divisions between queer colleagues

Not all participants connected with other queer staff members in their workplace. Certainly, it would be highly dubious to expect that all queer employees will always relate to or befriend each other. In this sub-theme, I highlight how queer identities do not always function as sites of connection and commonality. Instead, work-relationships with other queer workers can be experienced as a source of difference and division. These differences and divisions were apparent across several kinds of relationships in which participants described relationships of detachment, discrimination and harassment, and gendered inequality.

Some young people spoke about their detachment from other queer staff members. These relationships with other queer employees were strictly work-based, as both parties shared little in common. Six (6) participants (Alex, Powderoo, Diego, Nick, Maree and Steven) reflected on how their connections with other queer staff did not extend any further beyond mutual recognition as queer individuals who happened to work in the same organisation. While Diego had enjoyed working alongside another a 'gay guy' during his employment at a plant nursery, he also recognised that they were two different people who shared different motivations to their work. There was no shared point of commonality other than their mutual identification as 'gay' men:

Diego – Um [pause] I think he was not the sort person that I liked—he was a nice guy but he didn't like— cause I always liked nature and stuff like that, he was just there because he was between degrees... he was really nice but he liked sort of things that I wasn't really into, he was more into I guess appearance-type things and stuff like that, if that makes sense [laughs].

Relationships shared with queer managers were sometimes experienced as a source of discrimination and harassment, as evident in Kat's and Joseph's stories. Kat explained how her 'closeted' queer boss had fired her from her job at a pet store:

Kat – It sucked! Especially because part of the reason was because I was friends with the owner—an extremely closeted gay man. He identified as gay to few people and lived out his homosexual relationship in secret, he publicly identified as straight and lived his heterosexual relationship in the open. I was an out queer and constantly asked about my and his sexuality by co-workers (he's an effeminate man so everyone makes the assumption, in this case justified). I did not reveal his sexuality but it's that gay by association thing again. The heat got too much and my co-workers (heterosexual identifying women) were too uncomfortable with me so after two weeks I was fired.

On the surface level, Kat describes a story of discrimination in which is she treated unfairly because of her highly visible sexuality. However, this story is considerably more complicated as the perpetrator of sexuality-based discrimination is another queer individual who feels threatened by Kat's presence as an 'out' queer woman.

During his employment in the public sector, Joseph had experienced unwelcome sexual attention from his gay-identified manager who worked in the same office-space. Joseph did not appreciate the high level of sexual interaction between his 'gay boss' (unit manager) and himself, which included unwelcome physical touch such as 'arse slapping' and being treated like a 'play thing':

Joseph says: He [unit manager] slaps me on the arse, and calls upon me to entertain him throughout the day with tales of my weekends. The other girls notice this, and they think its favourable treatment; I disagree and think it's just annoying but not favourable, since he's more inclined to snap at me than anyone else. I guess that's the price one pays for having a gay boss.

Despite perceiving these experiences as 'annoying', Joseph did not construe this relationship as necessarily abusive. To a certain extent, Joseph appeared to accept his manager's actions as 'the price one pays for having a gay boss'. This 'price' included permitting his manager to kiss him on two occasions outside of work and having to regale his boss with sexual tales of his weekend adventures. To Joseph, these were means by which he had been able to exercise his own power and gain permanent employment and promotion from their relationship:

Joseph says: I started here as a temporary officer, and felt I needed his continued support for promotion to permanent officer. Now that I've received that promotion, I'm starting to draw more boundaries between us. He's resisting to some, accepting of others. We're still negotiating these points.

In his story, Joseph made occasional references to his agency, suggesting that he was in control of this erotically charged relationship. However, his story equally suggests that this was an ongoing negotiation of power between his boss and himself.

Queer colleagues were not always treated as equals in the workplace. Shirley had noted the favourable attention directed towards young gay male employees in a former hospitality-based workplace in which youth, masculinity, and physical appearances were admired qualities. In other words, Shirley believed it was sometimes more glamorous to be young, male and 'gay', particularly in service industries:

Shirley – I think they [other staff members] found it easier to accept a gay man just because it appeared to be more glamorous, I don't know, that's just how I think of it—it just appears to be glamorous—young, healthy, attractive men who are well-read, good jobs, talk well, and you know, and then you look at the other side and see what's a stereotype for a lesbian and its lower-paid, caring kind of jobs, no great financial or career aspirations (again stereotype) not necessarily well-groomed or well-dressed though it is within their own circles... the package is more attractive to be 'gay' and 'male' to some people and it was in that case.

In her current workplace at the call-centre, Shirley had also observed how queer women, indeed women employees in general, were mostly employed 'on the phones' while gay male employees generally did not take long to march through the ranks to supervisory or managerial positions. These observations highlight significant differences in gendered positions of organisational authority and power. It also further reinforces recognition that 'lesbian' and 'gay' identities do not always function as a shared basis of equality and commonality.

iii) Experiences of inclusion and exclusion within queer-majority workplaces

Queer-majority workplaces were organisational environments in which same-sex relationships and non-heterosexual identities were the norm. On this basis, these organisations were experienced as distinctly 'queer'. Within participants' accounts, these predominantly-queer spaces were also experienced as both inclusive and exclusive environments, depending on differences in organisational status and authority, and gender. Five (5) participants had been or were currently employed in workplaces in which the majority of employees visibly identified as non-heterosexual. Most of these organisations were small and correspondingly small in staff numbers. This sub-theme examines their stories across three configurations: queer-majority workplaces as sexually inclusive environments; as sheltered protection from wider exclusionary treatment; and, as exclusive environments across other differences in social positioning.

Queer-majority workplaces were experienced as inclusive environments in which 'lesbian' and 'gay' identities were the social norm. This is best illustrated by Kat's description of work-life as a bar attendant in an inner city gay venue:

Kat – I don't have to worry about being out (it's almost assumed); I don't have to worry about the reactions or consequences. I don't have to worry about being hit on. I'm in the centre of the [inner city] gay community. I work with some awesome people as well. Our licensee is the best boss I've ever had—he's fun, he values your work and your feedback which he is actually open to, he does what he can to make it a fun, interesting and safe place to work. It's funny at my current workplace; one of my closest workmates is a very attractive straight man—very butch.

In this story, Kat's straight friend is the odd character out in a distinctly 'gayed' space; Kat gleefully observes how he is regularly 'hit-on' by male patrons. This is an interesting parallel that Kat draws in regards to her own experiences of being sexually objectified as

a woman working in a 'straight' bar: 'Secretly I laugh my ass off because the boot is finally on the other foot!'

Queer-majority workplaces provided a limited degree of sheltered protection from the exclusionary actions of others outside these workspaces. Two (2) participants (Bruce and Pearson) were employed in large corporations that had numerous worksites across different locations and offices. While working for a bank firm, Bruce appreciated his time working in a queer-majority work-team that made him feel both 'proud' and 'good' about himself as a 'gay' employee. Bruce was later moved to an 'all-straight' male team in the same organisation. This was a stark contrast to his former work-team:

Bruce says: ... Most of the guys in my old team were gay also, including my boss who I became close friends with during my time there. I felt very comfortable working there, and I always looked forward to coming to work. It was a very social place to work. I then got on to the graduate programme, and then everything changed... The first department I worked had a very macho work culture. My graduate buddy came across as being quite homophobic. There was a strong management hierarchy. This made me feel frightened about disclosing my sexuality to management, even my own manager(s).

Similarly, Pearson felt included in his flight attendant crew, particularly when identifying as a gay male was perceived to be 'the norm' in this work environment: '... Gay guys definitely outnumber the straight guys, and it's definitely a more open workplace. It was weird to be in an environment where people initially assume you're gay, and it's in no way an issue.' Harking back to Pearson's earlier encounters with homonegative abuse, this 'gay' environment did not protect him from facing the prejudiced comments of 'homophobic' passengers on-board. Both accounts highlight how workplaces, particularly large organisations, are not configured around a singular culture. Alternatively, these larger work environments are multi-faceted and composed of inclusive as well as exclusive spaces within the same worksite.

Queer-majority workplaces were sometimes experienced as exclusive environments across other social dimensions; relations of gender and organisational power intersected with young people's experiences of queer-majority work environments. To illustrate, Alex quickly discovered that working for a queer-owned business was not always a problem-free ride. This was despite the sexually inclusive attitudes of her queer employers. One of Alex's first working experiences was as a waiter and kitchen-hand in a lesbian-owned and operated café: 'I was out and it was ok due to the type of cafe. I met amazing people and overall it was a positive experience for my sexual identity.' However, Alex's original expectations of her workplace were soon dashed as she became the target of what she perceived as bullying behaviour from the owners. This workspace of inclusion became a site of intimidation and criticism:

Alex says: I was tired of the bullying from the owners, I wasn't allowed to make the juices or handle any money, I had to carry heavy outdoor umbrellas and their stands up some narrow stairs and got very odd jobs such as cleaning the dirty marks on walls with a toothbrush. They [owners] mentioned that I wasn't taking initiative and needed to start doing things on my own instead of asking. In reality I was shy still and wasn't exactly sure of their routine. When I realised I started dreading work and my cold was lasting more than two weeks, I tearfully handed in my resignation and ran out the door with the feeling of guilt but also relief...

Alex experienced a number of bullying acts included being refused food and drink during long shifts, being continually held back late after the completion of her shift and often being refused days off when requested. In this scenario, the café owners extended their authority and power over Alex as a young and relatively inexperienced employee.

Gender was a marginalising factor for Ruby working in a community-based organisation as a youth worker. As a queer-majority workplace, this organisation fully appreciated and embraced sexual diversity. Working with and supporting people from sexually marginalised groups was part of their core business: 'Well the [organisation] is brilliant. I am surrounded by queer people; my sexuality is never an issue at my current

workplace.’ In the same account, Ruby described what it sometimes felt like as a woman in a workplace in which the majority of workers were gay-identifying men:

Paul – Are there any times when it’s [work] not-so-supportive? This may not necessarily be about sexualities.

Ruby – Yes, as a woman. As a queer woman too. There is sometimes some very sexist language and attitudes. Lesbian health and services to women are under-funded and under-recognized. We are overlooked. Often the overly sexualised nature of [work] can have its affects as it is mostly men that work here and most of them are attracted solely to men so women often don’t even get recognised for being in the room (not sexually, I’m talking generally).

Both Ruby’s and Alex’s stories illustrate that young queer people are not protected from differential treatment or bullying in queer-majority workplaces. Similarly, working in queer work-teams does not shield employees from the exclusionary expressions and practices of others located outside these team-environments. While queer-majority workplaces may provide some degree of inclusion and protection based on shared sexual identities, this cannot be assumed or guaranteed.

Summary

Both supportive and divided relationships were held with queer colleagues in sexually diverse workspaces. Participating in the workplace brought new opportunities to meet and connect with other visibly queer workers as participants shared supportive relationships with other ‘gay’ employees, felt reassured that other queer employees were both visible and accepted in their work environments, and appreciated the chance to extend their own social networks. In this sense, the workplace functioned as a site of safety and acceptance for queer workers and provided some young queer people with validation that their sexuality was ‘okay’. However, not all young queer people in this study

connected or associated with their queer colleagues; some participants described relationships of detachment, discrimination and harassment, and gendered inequality. Within these relationships, participants observed and encountered individual differences in organisational power, gender and social status. Similarly, queer-majority workplaces were experienced as both inclusive and exclusive environments. In short, being 'queer' in the workplace did not automatically provide a shared point of commonality or a guarantee of protection from exclusionary treatment.

Concluding comments to the chapter

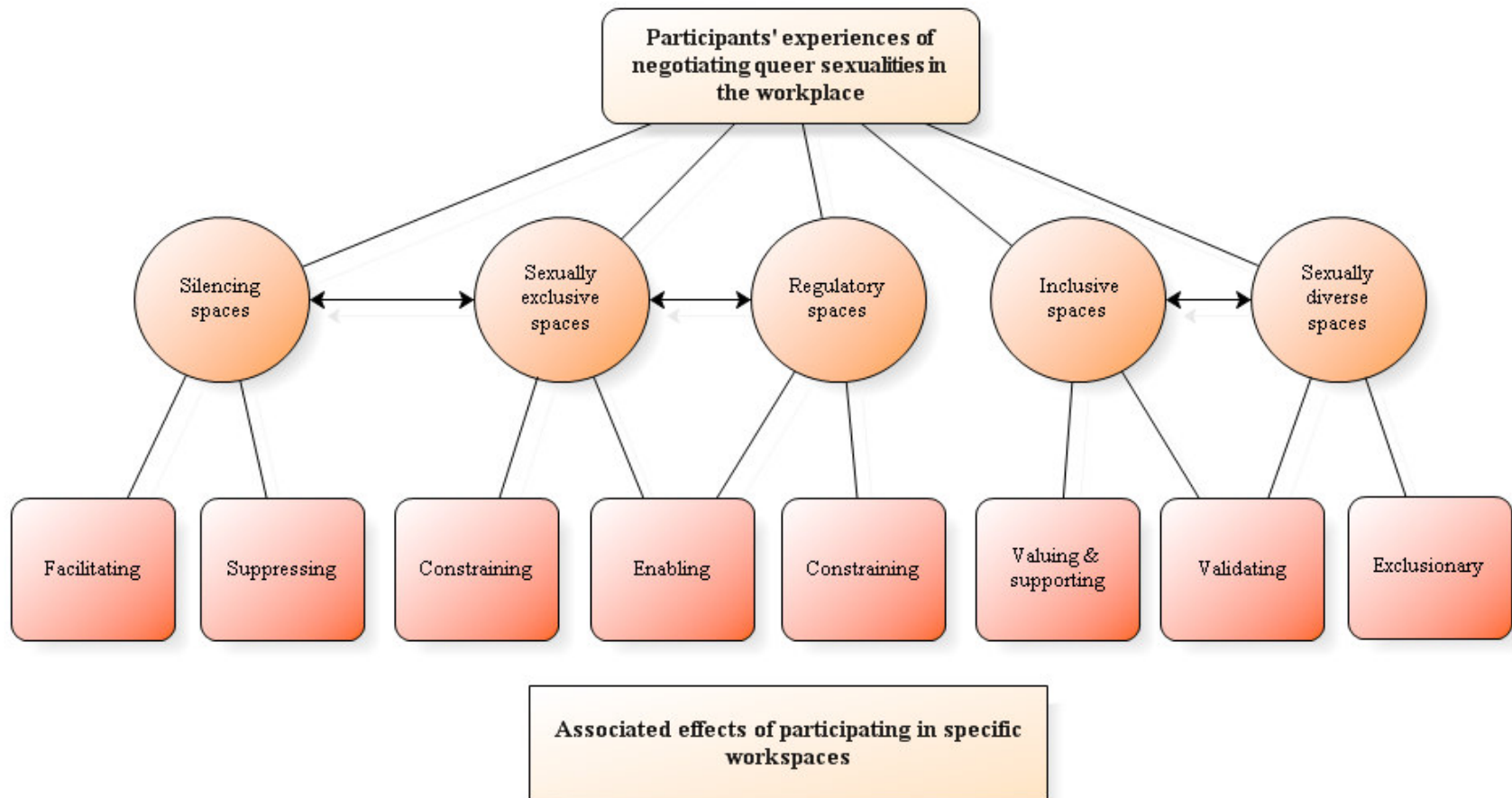
In this chapter, I have presented the final two core themes detailing how young people experience the workplace as queer workers. Building on the central threads emergent from the previous two chapters, this chapter articulates how the workplace can operate as an inclusive space and as a sexually diverse space. As heterosexual-majority sites, the workplace can function as both an exclusive and inclusive environment. Similarly, queer-majority workplaces can be experienced as exclusive and inclusive environments. This highlights how lines of inclusion/exclusion cut across the sexual configuration of the workplace.

The presence of mainly heterosexual subjectivities in the workplace does not preclude the exercise of inclusive practices towards queer employees and likewise, queer-majority environments do not necessarily guarantee safe or supportive spaces for young queer workers. The fundamental point is that regardless of the sexual configuration of the workplace as either straight- or sexually-diverse spaces, organisations have the capacity to provide inclusive, supportive and appreciative environments for young queer workers. This is a hopeful story that runs against the earlier problem-saturated accounts of the workplace as a sexually exclusive, regulatory and silencing space.

The following chapter builds on the key interpretations emergent from this and the preceding two findings chapters, and discusses how these findings contribute to and extend the knowledge base introduced in the literature chapters.

Figure 1

Participants' experiences of negotiating queer sexualities in the workplace



CHAPTER EIGHT

Negotiating multiple dimensions in the workplace

Introduction to the chapter

The thesis has focused on young people's experiences of negotiating queer sexualities in the workplace. The purpose of this inquiry was to explore how young queer workers experience workplace relationships and work cultures, and how organisational dynamics impact on their working lives. Therefore, this inquiry was led by the research question: *How do young people experience the workplace as queer workers?* Adopting a constructivist methodology, I applied three qualitative methods (web-based surveys, online interviews and face-to-face interviews) to provide accessible platforms for young queer people to discuss their work-based experiences. From my analysis of participants' stories, I identified five significant dimensions to their reflected experiences of paid employment across diverse settings. Within their reflections the workplace was represented as: 1) a sexually exclusive space; 2) a regulatory space; 3) a silencing space; 4) an inclusive space; and 5) a sexually diverse space. This typology of workplace dimensions, and the associated effects on participants' work-participation, is depicted in Figure 1. Although I describe these dimensions as distinct for the purposes of analysis, these spaces were not experienced as mutually exclusive. Within this discussion, I refer to space as a relational and metaphorical construct based on a human geographical definition (Valentine 2002). According to Valentine (2002), space is not defined as a fixed social backdrop, 'a pre-existing terrain', to the interactions of human actors. Instead, interpretations and perceptions of space are produced through social relations and the exchange of social meanings in situated contexts (Valentine 2002, p. 146).

While the present study conveys a similarly problematic story to other empirical studies of queer sexualities in the workplace, the research findings of this study indicate a more complex understanding of the research problem. The findings of this study highlight that in their negotiations of the workplace, young queer people experienced the workplace across multiple dimensions. This study illustrates how each of these five dimensions had

both enabling and constraining effects over the working lives of young queer people. In this chapter, I discuss the significance of these findings and articulate how they extend and modify the existing literature presented in Chapters Two and Three. In doing so, I highlight the contributions these findings make to the knowledge bases introduced in the literature. This chapter is organised into six components in alignment with the research findings: 1) the workplace as a sexually exclusive space; 2) counter-resistance to symbolic and material violence; 3) the workplace as a regulatory space; 4) the workplace as a silencing space; 5) the workplace as an inclusive space; and 6) the workplace as a sexually diverse space.

The workplace as a sexually exclusive space

The first significant finding in this study was that participants experienced the workplace as a sexually exclusive space: a space in which queer sexualities were separated from the sexual normalcy of heterosexuality. Consequently, many young people were punished, abused and treated discriminately because of their non-normative sexuality. This finding supports other studies that have discussed the workplace as a problematic and discriminatory space for queer workers (Asquith 1999; Badgett, 1996; Chrobot-Mason et al 2001; Colgan et al 2006; Druzin et al 1998; Fassinger 1995; Frank 2006; GLAD 1994; Griffith & Hebl 2002; Humphrey 1999; Hunt & Dick 2008; Irwin 1999; Levine & Leonard 1984; McCreery & Krupat 1999; McCreery 1999; Powers 1996; Ragins & Cornwell 2001; Ragins et al 2003; Rondahl et al 2007; Rostosky & Riggle 2002; Russ et al 2002; Shallenberger 1994; Skidmore 2004; Smith & Ingram 2004; Spradlin 1998; Taylor & Raeburn 1995; Waldo 1999; Ward & Winstanley 2003, 2006; Woods & Lucas 1993). In this study, the workplace was configured as a sexually exclusive space through the identified practices of symbolic and material violence and work-based discrimination. These exclusionary practices consolidated the workplace as a heteronormative environment.

Symbolic violence in the workplace

From the literature, heteronormativity is discussed as a discrete body of normalising logic that defies identification through its inscription as ‘natural’ and ‘normal’ (Yep 2003). Within his conceptual framework for interrogating heteronormative discourse, Yep (2002) describes the effects of ‘discursive violence’: ‘The words, tone gestures, and images that are used to differentially treat, degrade, pathologise, and represent lesbian and gay experiences’ (p. 170). This subtle imposition of power and sexual normalcy ties in with Bourdieu’s (1977, p. 191) theorising of symbolic violence as a socially sanctioned expression of violence exchanged through language, social interaction and the imposition of meaning. In the social setting of secondary schools, Barron & Bradford (2007) propose that: ‘Symbolic violence—as a form of domination—has acquired a normality and naturalness, an essential “taken-for-grantedness” that emerges in the fabric of everyday school cultures’ (p. 244).

The present study extends the concepts of heteronormativity and symbolic violence to the workplace context. Young people in this study described a range of symbolically violent practices, imposed through language and meaning, that continually reinforced the normalcy and ‘taken-for-grantedness’ of heterosexuality in work cultures. These practices were also effective in reaffirming queer subjectivities as separate and inferior to heterosexual relations. The expression of symbolic violence further demonstrates what McCreery (1999) has described as the inscription of heterosexual norms within organisational cultures. This also reinforces Valentine’s (199b) discussion of the workplace as one of many *heterosexualised spaces* in which the spatial supremacy of heterosexuality is sustained through ‘taken for granted process[es] of power relations which operate in most everyday environments’ (p. 410). In this section, I focus on the most distinct types of symbolic violence evident in the findings. These symbolic practices consolidated the heteronormative configuration of the workplace.

The first type of symbolic violence experienced in this study involved a series of subtle normalising encounters that left young queer people feeling situated outside the established boundaries of sexual normalcy. These encounters included experiences such as overhearing loud and exaggerated tales of heterosexual exploits, feeling detached

from group-cultures, noticing visible expressions of discomfort from other staff, and encountering the ever-present presumption of heterosexuality. Participants discussed how these subtle encounters made them feel ostracised as non-heterosexual workers.

One notable normalising encounter, discussed by several young people, entailed listening to the routine exchange of stories about male heterosexual exploits within male-dominant work-settings. Hearing this exchange frequently reminded these unwilling audience members of their sexual otherness and non-normality as queer employees. Equally, several young men expressed their sense of seclusion in male-dominant workplaces. This sense of otherness was further emphasised through witnessing the expression of homonegative comments. This finding reiterates the gendered implications of male-dominated work cultures as a social site for reproducing hegemonic masculinities and homophobic discourse, as discussed in other workplace studies (Collinson & Collinson 1989; Embrick et al 2007; McLean et al 1997). It also validates Plummer's (1999) argument that homophobia is a *gendered*, as well as a sexualised, social process which 'distinguishes "the other" from [the] collectively authorised view of the acceptable "self"' (p. 81). Plummer (1999) has asserted that the expression of homophobia between men helps sustain divisions between desirable and undesirable sexual subjects: 'Homophobic processes are not only about differentiating "real boys" from feminine boys or from girls... it is more generally about distinguishing and marking undesirable otherness (being alien)' (Plummer 1999, p. 79).

The questioning of participants' sexual lives was another type of symbolic violence evident in this study. Similarly, almost a third (29%) of Irwin's (1999, p. 30) respondents had experienced 'inappropriate questioning' about their sexuality at work. Intrusive questioning has a more confrontational element than other forms of symbolic violence because it is far less easy to evade questions that specifically target one's sexual identity. This relates to Sedgwick's (1990, p. 79) discussion of how queer people are often deemed illegitimate to speak with authority about their own sexual identity; this is another effect of homophobia that frequently accompanies the process of 'coming out'. The level of intrusive questioning evident in this study undermines the capacity of young people to speak with authority about their sexuality; the validity of queer sexualities is destabilised while heterosexuality stands beyond question.

One other type of symbolic violence discussed in this study was the exchange of sexual humour that denigrated queer sexualities. This finding is consistent with other workplace studies that discuss how homophobic sentiments are often embedded within the language of sexual humour (Embrick et al 2007; McLean et al 1997; Ward & Winstanley 2006). From Irwin's (1999, p. 30) national survey, humorous jokes and remarks were the most frequently reported form of 'homophobic behaviour' in current workplaces. The exchange of sexual humour serves a primary purpose in distancing the speaker and its receptive audience from ideas of sexual abnormality and a secondary purpose in reaffirming a sense of collective belonging, particularly amongst male audiences (Embrick et al 2007). On this basis, it is understandable why some young people may choose to participate in this form of joke telling; participation brings entry into dominant group membership and a degree of protection from victimisation.

One final type of symbolic violence evident in this study involved the witnessing of homonegative abuse and discrimination. Participants were silent witnesses to symbolic acts such as the exchange of homonegative comments or to unjust practices such as the discriminatory treatment of other queer workers. This form of witnessing diminished young people's sense of safety and security in their employment. This is a key finding that sheds further light on the secondary effects of homonegativity. Previous workplace studies (Asquith 1999; Colgan et al 2006; Irwin 1999; McDermott 2006; Ward & Winstanley 2003) have not discussed the vicarious impact of witnessing homonegative abuse and discrimination.

From the psychology literature, Noelle (2002) has described the 'ripple effect' of homophobic violence that can generate responses of vicarious trauma in people who share a similar sexual membership. Noelle (2002) examined the distressed responses of lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals to well-cited media cases of homophobia, such as the brutal murder of Matthew Shepherd in the United States. In my study, several young people were positioned as silent witnesses in close proximity to the abuse and mistreatment of other queer workers. This proximity could magnify the 'ripple effect' of secondary trauma. This has several implications for young queer workers. From a human resources perspective, this could have a deleterious impact on young people's capacity to confidently perform their work-duties and communicate with other staff. From a psychosocial perspective, this kind of vicarious trauma could generate elevated distress

and anxiety at having to participate in these same work-relationships. Moreover, witnessing homonegative expressions may reinforce wider cultural messages of sexual subordination.

The various types of symbolic violence discussed in this study reflect attempts to sustain a cultural pretence of sexual normalcy in the workplace. These symbolic practices are integral to reinforcing heteronormative work cultures in which the normalcy of heterosexual relations is firmly cemented into organisational life. This set of findings supports Butler's (1991) theoretical argument that heterosexuality has to persistently impose itself as a hegemonic state to sustain its appearance of natural superiority. From a performative understanding of gender and sexuality, this repeated imposition enables heterosexuality to appear as the 'naturalised state' in which 'compulsory heterosexuality sets itself up as the original, the true, the authentic' (Butler 1991, p. 21). My study highlights the costs of this cultural imposition—the violence and discrimination experienced by young queer people in their workplaces.

The effects of material violence and discrimination in the workplace

Material violence and discrimination had many harmful and oppressive effects in young queer people's working lives. In this section I discuss first, the expression of material violence and its subjectifying effects, and second, work-based discrimination and how it reifies heteronormative ideals about what constitutes a 'good worker'. I then examine who perpetrates violence and discrimination in the workplace before elaborating on how it affects young queer people's health and wellbeing.

A small group of participants recounted the pain of material violence in the workplace—exclusionary practices that encompassed violent acts such as physical assault and verbal abuse. Expressions of material violence were described by participants as direct attacks that intended harm against them because of their sexuality. There was no single type of perpetrator, although a large majority of perpetrators were men. Perpetrators included managers, co-workers, customers and service consumers. These findings correspond with reported incidents of homophobic abuse from larger workplace studies in Australia

(Irwin 1999) and the UK (Colgan et al 2006). In particular, the expression of homonegative abuse described in this study supports findings from Irwin's (1999) and Asquith's (1999) respective research in which abuse was experienced in a series of recurring incidents. This finding also resonates with Mason's (2002, p. 68) discussion of violence as an act of 'spatial management'. Homophobic violence can be a means of reclaiming territories as heterosexual and masculine spaces. The reported incidents of homonegative violence in this study suggest attempts by perpetrators to mark out hetero-masculinised territories in the workplace.

My research found that the expression of material violence held wider effects than simply punishing young workers because of their sexuality. Material violence was also intended as a subjectifying experience. Expressions of verbal abuse convey wider cultural, homonegative messages about the sexual and gender identity of young people. As a young queer women, Peggie was inscribed the identity of a 'pussy licker' by her male manager in the bookstore. These words convey subordinate messages about Peggie's identity as an overtly sexualised (and lesbian) subject. These subjectifying effects support Mason's (2002) discussion of how lesbian women experience homophobic violence as a process of subjectification. Mason (2002, p. 116) argues that violence operates as a process of subjectification by constructing particular kinds of oppressive knowledge-claims, not only about the individual victim, but also about the wider collective group to which the victim is believed to belong.

In associating Peggie's identity with non-procreative sexual acts (as a 'pussy licker'), Peggie is associated with what Mason (2002, p. 46) discusses as feminised and sexual discourses of dirt and uncleanness. These discourses position female, homosexual bodies as a source of bodily disorder. Thus, the intention of homophobic violence is to single out and amend queer subjectivities that threaten the dominant sexual and gender order (Mason 2002, p. 47). Similarly, Ruby had been publicly labelled as a 'paedophile' by her colleagues in the student union. Her story poignantly illustrates both the process of subjectification and the politics of sexual shaming. Warner (2000, p. 17) has argued that the potential to be publicly shamed can be totalising in its effects: once accusations are voiced, regardless of the actions of the accused, 'shame rules' as a publicly vilified status. In Ruby's story, she had to bear the brunt of being named and shamed as a

‘paedophile’ in the local media. This was a vicious form of public subjectification that had dire consequences, such as losing contact with family members.

Violence can also hold subjectifying effects for young gay men. For example, Pearson had endured abusive name-calling from customers, such as ‘fag’ and ‘poof’; these homophobic terms imply an impaired gender-identity as a failed male. Connell (2005, p. 78) has discussed how such gender attacks re-affirm the gender status of gay men as ‘subordinate masculinities’ while Plummer (1999) has argued that terms such as ‘poof’ and ‘poofster’ share one inherent meaning: ‘unacceptable male difference’ (p. 78). Through these violent expressions, un-masculine and un-desirable bodies are identified as posing a threat to the social status of hegemonic masculinities (Plummer 1999, p. 79).

A small group of young people in this study had experienced discrimination at work. Their experiences of discrimination build on Hillier et al’s (2005, p. 36) findings in which same-sex attracted young people indicated numerous experiences of work-based discrimination. Unlike material violence, acts of discrimination were sanctioned through formal processes of human resources management, such as through performance appraisals or employee dismissal. A deleterious effect of discrimination is that it erodes young employees’ trust in senior staff and management. Likewise, it undermines young workers’ sense of inclusion in their work-relationships. This is an important consideration given that Hillier et al (2005) have argued that: ‘...resilience in young people is dependent on connectedness and trust in other people, two things that are destroyed when young people are treated as outsiders’ (p. 37).

Discriminatory actions conveyed denigrating messages about participants’ work performance, capacities and, accordingly, identities as paid employees. For example, Franky’s evangelical boss expressed his homophobia by assigning Franky a ‘gay chair’ before terminating his employment as a bad employee who was ‘unable to do the work’. Ultimately, discriminatory actions affix identity labels to young people as bad workers. In effect, acts of work-based discrimination strengthen the normative foundations of what constitutes a ‘good worker’: a heterosexual worker. Feminist writers have argued that despite dominant representations of the worker as a bodiless, asexual and non-emotional role, in reality the worker is primarily inscribed as a male role (Acker 1990). I would further argue that normative (and habitually taken-for-granted) definitions of ‘the

worker' encompass both male and heterosexual bodies, reinforcing the dominant ideal of the paid worker as a heteronormative construct. The acts of discrimination experienced by several young people in this study convey preferred sociocultural ideals about what a worker 'should be' in the eyes of others such as managers and organisational leaders—not homosexual. This division between what constitutes a good worker versus a bad worker mirrors the Western binary logic of the heterosexual/homosexual divide. In doing so, it reiterates Sedgwick's (1990, p. 1) theoretical assertion that the heterosexual/homosexual binary infiltrates all aspects of modern Western culture, including the workplace.

Another key finding in this study was that the majority of perpetrators of material violence and discrimination were men, typically older men. The most disturbing finding was that the majority of these men were employed in senior and managerial positions. As newcomers to the labour market, young employees should expect direction, mentorship and support from their superiors—not abuse and discrimination. This finding addresses a gap in Irwin's (1999) study of Australian workplaces, which does not report on the characteristics of perpetrators of homophobic behaviours. This finding suggests that men may hold higher stakes in maintaining the sexual status quo of the workplace. For older men in managerial positions, authority over other employees is formally legitimised within organisational hierarchies. This higher position of power does not itself grant permission to treat other staff in an abusive manner but it does present greater opportunities to extend this power over others in oppressive ways. This gendered system of organisation hints at a wider social arrangement that Valentine (1993b) describes as 'heteropatriarchy': an ideological state in which compulsory heterosexual relations depend on, reproduce, and sustain male dominance in Western patriarchal societies.

Working in sexually exclusive workspaces had a detrimental impact on the psychosocial wellbeing of the participants in this study. Young people elaborated on the numerous health effects of material violence and discrimination; the injuries sustained to their emotional, mental, physical, and financial health. This finding supports previous workplace studies charting the psychosocial injuries of queer employees labouring in abusive work environments (Driscoll et al 1996; Irwin 1999; Smith & Ingram 2004; Waldo 1999). Material violence and discrimination had cumulative effects in this study. For example, Peggie spoke about the mental, physical, and, consequently, financial

stress that accumulated from her experiences of bullying and, later, assault at the men's clothing store. This cumulative effect is a particularly concerning finding when considering the results of existing psychological studies. Other studies have indicated that homophobic victimisation can generate responses of distress and trauma for young queer people as well as impairing their self-esteem (D'Augelli et al 2002; Huebner et al 2004; Poteat 2007).

In spite of their experiences of material violence and discrimination, participants were not permanently positioned as 'victims' and did not describe themselves as powerless. The young people who had been targets of material violence and discrimination secured later employment, established new work-relationships and found confidence in discussing their sexual identities and relationships in the workplace. None of these young people were thwarted in the continuation of their work-lives or were locked into denigrating and demoralising subject positions. The following section expands on this idea of transcending victimhood.

Counter-resistance to symbolic and material violence

In this study, participants recounted multiple strategies for resisting the homonegative beliefs and actions of others in the workplace. This finding is significant for three reasons. First, in response to the critique of other authors on the limited representation of young queers in research and policy (Harwood 2004; Rofes 2004; Russell et al 2000; Savin-Williams 2001, 2005; Talburt 2004a, 2004b), this study illuminates how young queer workers are positioned as both agents of change as well as victims of exclusionary practices. This is important given that Blackburn (2007) proposes that young queers are in the strongest position to work against oppression when identifying with multiple subject positions. This includes the capacity to recognise the injury of sexual oppression as victims *and* to assume a position of agency in seeking to initiate change in their social environment.

Second, this finding extends appreciation for the resilience of young queer people. It highlights their capacity to cope with stressful life-events and the developmental obstacles that are thrown in their path. This affirms Savin-Williams' (2005) argument about the significance of recognising young queer people as resilient agents: 'Describing these young people as resilient acknowledges the developmental assets they've accumulated over their life-course—abilities, traits, and ways of circumventing adversity and health-damaging behaviours...' (p. 183). My research demonstrates how young people circumvent adversity in the workplace.

Third, these findings highlight that sexually exclusive workplaces can be experienced as enabling as well as constraining environments. Encountering heterosexist attitudes and homonegative expressions in their workplaces mobilised young people into exercising a range of strategies geared towards resistance and change. This is consistent with Foucault's description of power networks as always contested in human relationships; at each point in which power is exercised, there exists a 'plurality of resistances' (Foucault 1978, p. 95, 1980d, p. 142). From this theoretical position, young people are never located in positions of complete powerlessness but can be both enabled as well as constrained in their actions. From this position, the workplace can be interpreted as a space suffused with power relations that are always negotiable and discursive. Power is not possessed by one group of organisational actors, despite people occupying distinct positions of organisational authority. Alternatively, power is contestable between differently positioned actors. In this section, I focus on the most common strategies depicted in participants' stories.

A small group of young people had chosen to resign and leave their abusive work environments. Lutgen-Sandvik's (2006) has conceptualised the tensions in vacating employment as a form of both resistance and control. Resigning can be experienced as a form of resistance in refusing to participate in bullying work environments. It can also be experienced as a form of control, as the vacating employee's concerns are conveniently removed (Lutgen-Sandvik 2006, p. 425). The motivations expressed by participants in my study were much more straightforward—to no longer endure abusive work-relationships and to seek employment in safer and more supportive environments. However, their decision to leave the workplace does convey their refusal to participate in exclusionary relationships.

The dismissal and questioning of homonegative expressions was one popular strategy for change in this study. These strategies are noteworthy as they illustrate how, on an introspective level, young people refuse to accept the homonegative beliefs of others and, on an interpersonal level, how young people speak out and question the oppressive rationale of these dominant discourses. For example, Trent explained how he had single-handedly questioned the stereotypical beliefs of his male co-workers about gay men. This finding supports Hillier and Harrison's (2004) analysis of the ways in which same-sex attracted young people locate the 'fault lines' in oppressive discourses. There is always the potential for finding the cracks and inconsistencies in homonegative discourse; as a set of culturally situated ideas, beliefs, and perspectives, discourses are never totalising or beyond question (Hillier & Harrison 2004). In my research, many young people perceived homonegative beliefs, sentiments and stereotypes as archaic, illogical and dispensable.

While a small number of young people in this study had taken informal action against perpetrators of material violence and discrimination, only one young person (Peggie) had pursued formal action. Hillier et al's (2005, p. 63) national research indicates that same-sex attracted young people are least likely to disclose to and seek support from 'professionals' in comparison to friends and family members. In connection to my research, this may exclude professionals such as trade union staff, equal opportunity (EO) officers or employee assistance providers, diminishing the probability of young queers accessing both internal and external support mechanisms.

An equally important finding was that only one young person (Franky) had contacted their state's EO commission but decided not to pursue their complaint of discrimination because of insubstantial proof. This finding fits with reported barriers from other queer employees who have considered pursuing claims of unfair treatment (Colgan et al 2007; Irwin 1999). One other barrier reported in my study involved having to revisit experiences of discrimination long after they had occurred. Both barriers have been discussed in wider critiques of EO laws that place immense responsibility on the shoulders of individual complainants to initiate legal proceedings and prove discrimination (Thornton 1994, 1995a, 2000). In a similar vein, trade unions held little significance in young people's responses to material violence and discrimination. This is to be expected when considering that young people in Australia are reported to be the

lowest age group (15–24 years) to currently hold union membership (McDonald et al 2007). The feelings of isolation described by many participants may also compromise their capacity to seek out support from other staff and to access external services, such as trade unions.

Participants in this study deployed a range of educative strategies. These strategies were reported as the most popular method for challenging work cultures of heterosexual presumption and heteronormality. This finding is consistent with what Creed and Scully (2000) discuss as queer ‘encounters’ for organisational change. According to Creed & Scully (2002), queer encounters not only legitimise the visibility of queer sexualities but also hold both personal and political possibilities for change. In a similar fashion, participants in my study referred to their sexual identities and life-experiences as a source of experiential knowledge and a catalyst for change. However, there were restricted conditions through which these strategies could be exercised.

One such condition involved the kinds of information young people deemed to be socially acceptable for sharing with workplace audiences; the majority of educative encounters occurred within censored boundaries. Some of these educative moments relied on the normalisation of queer sexualities through stressing the domestic docility of same-sex relationships or by emphasising relationships of love and romance. This excluded explicit discussions of sexual acts, desires and fantasies. Kat’s story was one exception in which she had persistently sought to question the sexual morals of her colleagues, albeit under safe conditions. It is highly likely that most participants would have lost their work-audience if they did speak outside perceived boundaries of sexual normalcy.

This finding supports previous studies of disclosure by queer employees in seeking to ‘normalise’ their sexuality (Clair et al 1999; Woods & Lucas 1993) and, more specifically, the findings of Crawley and Broad’s (2004) study of ‘coming out’ panels. Crawley and Broad (2004) noted how in their storytelling practices, queer speakers would seek to distance their intimate relationships from overtly sexualised elements and would alternatively stress emotional dimensions, such as the length and monogamous status of their relationships. This has ramifications for non-heterosexual employees whose relationships do not prescribe to heteronormative expectations of monogamy or

long-term pairing as their voices may be muted. This finding suggests that as informal ‘educators’, young queer people are placed under pressure to continually present themselves as ‘good’ gays and lesbians. In this sense, educative strategies can only be exercised within normative boundaries.

In my research, the burden of educating other workers about sexual diversity and same-sex relationships frequently fell on the shoulders of young queer people. It was the sole responsibility of queer workers a) to initiate educative strategies; and b) to make assessments regarding how to educate others. Within heteronormative environments, heterosexual workers do not have to undertake the same educative process because knowledge about their sexual status and intimate relationships is neither questioned nor buried under sexual stereotypes and homonegative discourses. This suggests an additional burden of labour for young queer employees, which draws heavily on their own sexual lives as a source of knowledge. Within work-relationships, there may be little respite from this form of intensely personal labour.

The workplace as a regulatory space

This study articulates how the workplace can be experienced as a regulatory space: a space in which participants had to negotiate a series of self-regulating practices to ensure that their sexualities remained invisible. Participants abided by these self-regulatory processes in lieu of former experiences of, and in anticipation of, homonegative treatment in the workplace. Hence, the workplace as regulatory space warrants separate discussion while sharing some overlap with the previous discussion of sexually exclusive workspaces. This theme confirms Emslie’s (1998, p. 167) proposal that young queer people anticipate heterosexism and homophobia in the workplace. It also highlights young queer people’s sensitivity to what Russell & Bohan (2006) describe as the ubiquity of homonegativity. In this section, I discuss the theorising of bodywork at a conceptual level before elaborating on the work contexts in which bodywork was undertaken and the various processes evident within participants’ accounts.

Theorising bodywork

Previous writers in organisational studies have spoken of bodywork in different contexts. McDowell (1995, 2004) discusses bodywork in the context of how employees in corporate settings embody sexual and gender norms within their work practices and interactions. Wolkowitz (2002) has discussed the social implications of bodywork as an occupational field spanning industries in which work is undertaken on the bodies of others, from beauticians to medical physicians. In this study, I apply this term to the self-regulatory strategies undertaken by young queer workers to ensure that queer sexualities remained invisible in the workplace. It is not so much an *embodied effect* but a set of *bodily strategies*, giving emphasis to the exercise of agency within these strategies.

Other writers have referred to self-regulatory practices in the workplace as strategies of concealment (Emslie 1998) or the more value-laden terms of ‘passing’ and ‘counterfeiting’ (Woods & Lucas 1993). While these concepts chiefly focus on verbal patterns of concealment, in this study young people described in vivid detail the monitoring and modification of their bodily actions and self-presentation as well as their patterns of speech. On this basis, it can be argued that bodywork is a process for ensuring that one’s body and identity, including one’s speech, are not interpreted as non-heterosexual. It shares one similarity with the above-mentioned practices—its reliance on the presumption of heterosexuality.

Processes of bodywork can be likened to disciplinary techniques that participants abide by under the non-physical but ever-present surveillance and normalising judgement of others (Foucault 1977, 1980e). These are disciplinary strategies adhered to under the assumed normalcy of heterosexuality and the potential threat of symbolic and material violence. Therefore, bodywork represents two mutually constitutive processes in this study: 1) on a pragmatic level, it is a form of agency exercised by young queer workers as a means of protecting themselves and their employment; and 2) on a discursive level, it is a set of micro-techniques that queer individuals assume in the self-disciplining of their non-normative bodies. This level of complexity mirrors Foucault’s (1978) conceptualisation of power relations as simultaneously ‘intentional and nonsubjective’ (p. 94). In this sense, the exercise of power can be both productive and constraining.

Mason (2002, p. 87) argues that the screening and supervising of the body is an integral process for ensuring safety and protection from homophobic violence. My study supports this cartographic process, across the three considerations (*personal, spatial and temporal*) identified in Mason's (2002) study of how lesbian women generate safety maps in public spaces. For some young people in my study, *personal* experiences of homonegative treatment in former workplaces informed their compliance to heterosexual norms. However, the awareness and anticipation of homonegativity was enough to warrant a similar level of compliance from others. The culture of the workplace as an implicitly heterosexualised *spatial* arrangement reinforced participants' self-regulation of their actions, self-presentation and spoken words. The *temporality* of work between set hours governed when participants had to ascribe to processes of bodywork. The cartography of the homosexual body was also significant to young queer people in monitoring and ensuring that their verbal expressions, actions and self-presentation would not be interpreted as significations of non-heterosexual subjectivities.

The contexts of bodywork

In this study's findings, there were certain work contexts in which it was imperative to sustain invisibility as queer subjects. The four most commonly described contexts were: working in highly-masculinised workspaces, working with children and young people, working with people dependent on care, and working under the memory of former experiences of homonegative abuse. These were social contexts in which young people felt compelled to adhere to processes of bodywork and to conceal their sexuality.

Within the first context, a small group of young men elaborated on the imperative to stay invisible within masculine-dominated and 'straight' work environments. For these young men, it felt safer to conform to dominant masculine and heterosexual norms, rather than working against these inscribed gender and sexual norms. Young men employed within masculine-dominated workplaces, whether in blue- or white-collar industries, are implicitly expected to conform to the cultural standards of what Connell (2005, p. 77) has discussed as hegemonic masculinities. The nexus between masculinity and heterosexuality in masculine-dominated workspaces may place heterosexual men under

similar group-pressure to conform to hegemonic masculine ideals (Kenway et al 2000). However, for young gay men their discredited status as ‘subordinate masculinities’ (Connell 2005, p. 78) makes it additionally important to work hard at signifying a heterosexual identity. This requires additional work from young gay men to present themselves in a socially acceptable light.

The invisibility of queer sexualities was a profound theme in young people’s stories of working with children and adolescents. Participants expressed their horror at the potential association between themselves and paedophilia while at the same time carefully regulating their actions and speech in the presence of children and adolescents. From Irwin’s (1999, p. 30) national survey, a number of respondents (42) reported accusations of paedophilia, marking the fear discussed by participants in my study a potential reality. It also highlights how the potential accusation of paedophilia can work as a discursive frame to constitute queer employees as ‘dangerous subjects’. Participants’ fears and anxieties were embedded in wider sociocultural associations between homosexual bodies and children’s moral and physical safety. This finding reiterates the dominant discursive effects of what McCreery (1999) has identified as the ‘discourse of endangered children’ in which homosexual bodies represent a supposed sexual threat to the ‘moral and physical welfare of children’ (p. 41). Within Western popular culture, children and adolescents are often positioned as socio-political conduits through which homonegative messages of homosexual perversion are expressed.

A small group of young people in this study were highly sensitised to cultural fears of homosexual contamination; this was a powerful and disabling discourse entrenched in their work with children and adolescents. These young people discussed how they were always mindful of the potentially homonegative gaze of co-workers, senior staff, parents and concerned community members. For example, Luke was routinely aware of the watchful eyes of parents as he instructed their children in the learn-to-swim program. This is a key finding as it demonstrates the regulatory power of the normalising gaze. As discussed by Foucault (1980e), the normalising gaze is a coercive and non-physical exercise of disciplinary power: ‘Just a gaze, an inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against himself’ (p. 155). In their work practices, these young people were ever mindful of how they may be

recast as 'dangerous' subjects under the authoritative judgement of others. The heteronormative gaze was a panoptic structure at the centre of their stories. Consequently, these young people assumed responsibility for monitoring their every action and for concealing any signification of homosexuality.

The fear of being perceived as 'dangerous' subjects accompanied Ingrid and Steven into their early teaching careers. Their reported anxiety corresponds with previously documented concerns from queer teachers regarding the risks of identifying as non-heterosexual in schools and being interpreted as sexually dangerous subjects by both students and adults (Clarke 1996; Ferfolja 1998, 2007; Morrow & Gill 2003; Russ et al 2002; Sykes 1998). Consistent with the literature, Ingrid's and Steven's preference to keep their sexualities invisible are indicative of broader pedagogical tensions in 'coming out' in the classroom. Queer teachers are routinely locked between positions of 'coming out' as a politicised practice versus the occupational hazards attached to being 'out' (Clarke 1996; Gust 2007; Khayatt 1997; Rasmussen 2004).

Within the third context, fear of being miscast as sexually dangerous subjects infiltrated the work experiences of two young people working with adult clients dependent on their care. There is a common thread in their stories and the previous stories of working with children and adolescents. Within both work contexts, clients with debilitating disabilities and children are positioned as 'vulnerable' subjects requiring protection from homosexual contamination and sexual abuse. The potential to be subjectively positioned as a sexual threat is a discursive frame that perpetually hangs over the heads of queer workers employed in this kind of intimate caring work.

Former experiences of homonegative abuse in both the workplace and other social settings determined the decision of several young people to stay invisible as queer employees; this was the fourth context of bodywork. For young people who had experienced abuse and discrimination in previous employment, their stories illustrate the long-term, disciplining effects of homonegativity in the workplace. A crucial finding in this theme was how memories of previous abuse from school environments lingered with three participants into their work-lives and compelled them to remain silent about their sexuality at work. This supports Emslie's (1998, p. 167) proposal that negative experiences in other social settings, such as school communities, can lead to young

employees entering the workplace anticipating discrimination and harassment. Within the literature, it is well established that secondary schools are a site of homonegative abuse and bullying for non-heterosexual (D'Augelli et al 2002; Hillier et al 1998, 2005; Poteat & Espelage 2007) and non-gender conforming youth (Horn 2007). The psychosocial implications of school-based abuse, such as reported signs of post-traumatic stress, anxiety, depression and social withdrawal, are likewise documented (D'Augelli et al 2002; Poteat & Espelage 2007). These adverse effects may accompany young queer people into their work-relationships, and more alarmingly, be reinforced through repeated forms of work-based victimisation.

Processes of bodywork

Within the work contexts discussed above, young people felt compelled to conceal their sexuality by adhering to self-regulatory processes of bodywork. Processes of self-vigilance, concealment and hiding are familiar practices to same-sex attracted young people across various settings (Britzman 1997, p. 194; Emslie 1999, p. 162; Hillier et al 2005; Telford 2003). Sustaining these practices of concealment can be 'emotionally and socially crippling' for young people as it compromises their sense of identity and self-worth, and threatens their psychological health (Emslie 1999, p. 163). It also compromises their autonomy to self-identify how they choose. The findings from my study demonstrate the application of these concealing practices by young people in the workplace context.

The first key process of bodywork was evident in the ways in which participants' constantly monitored and modified their speech and patterns of spoken communication. This entailed elaborate and tiresome measures such as not alluding to same-sex partners in conversation or instead using gender-neutral pronouns. The vigilance required to modify one's spoken words and to hide the knowledge of same-sex partners is an anxiety-ridden, stressful and laborious process. This process is reported in the literature as a routine strategy for other queer employees (Clair et al 2005; Chrobot-Mason et al 2001; Woods & Lucas 1993, p. 139). Likewise, it was an additional process of labour for young queer workers in this study.

Some young queer workers felt they had to dodge and avoid questions about their sexuality and intimate relationships from children and adolescents. These questions signify attempts by children to name and know their teachers and carers as particular sexual subjects. This finding supports Gust's (2007) argument that regardless of whether 'queer' teachers are in/out of the closet they cannot escape processes of sexual subjectification in the classroom. Similarly, Harrison and Hillier (1999) have argued that students exercise power over teachers in the ways they choose to interpret and name teachers' bodies. My research shows that these subjectifying effects extend beyond the confines of the classroom as these effects are intrinsic to work-relationships between queer workers and children and adolescents in general.

A second process of bodywork was the practice of 'playing it straight': performing straight personas to ensure participants' safety and to provide reassurance to others. This was strikingly apparent in the stories of a small group of young men employed in masculine-dominated workplaces who felt obliged to signify a heterosexual status to their male peers. Other workplace studies have elaborated on the means by which queer women attempt to signify heterosexuality in their work-relationships (McDermott 2006; Sykes 1998). In my study, young queer women did not elaborate on these kinds of processes; this was a common theme for young men only. Barron and Bradford (2007, p. 47) describe this kind of performance as the adherence to 'straight ontologies' or 'straight ways of being'. This performance is intensified for young gay men located in hyper-masculinised settings in which young men experience pressure to conform to the same presentation of self (Barron & Bradford 2007, p. 247).

Several young men in this study described their attempts to 'play it straight' as situated performances within specific work environments and relationships. As discussed by Jack and Michael, some workspaces were experienced as distinctly more heterosexualised than others. Both participants discussed feeling more comfortable working in some departments, namely feminised spaces, in contrast to more masculinised spaces. This finding highlights the partitioning of organisational environments into distinct sexual and gendered spaces. It lends support to Fleming's (2007) argument that the workplace is not structured around one set of established sexual norms or one complicit way of 'doing' sexuality. Alternatively, the workplace is experienced as a sexually contested space in

which young queer employees feel obliged to conform to heterosexual ideals in some work environments but by no means all environments.

The third process of bodywork involved the use of selective silence in the workplace as a protective measure. Several young people felt that they were too busy ‘working out’ their sexuality in their mid-teens to feel confident in disclosing this information at work. These stories suggest that young queer people learn to be silent about their sexuality from early participation in the workforce. For young people who are relatively new to the ‘coming out’ process, discussing their sexuality at work may be a highly daunting task. For young workers located in ‘precarious employment’ (White & Wyn 2008, p. 174), keeping silent about their sexuality may be a higher priority than facing potential threats to their ongoing employment.

One other central finding within this theme was the ways in which participants’ resisted undertaking processes of bodywork, despite many invitations into concealing queer sexualities at work. This was evident at numerous points in their stories. For example, Powderoo refused to be deterred by the critical gaze of other staff from visibly walking out of the store with her transgender companion. This finding shows that while undertaking bodywork requires a degree of compliance to dominant sexual and gender norms, it is by no means a completely immobilising process. Rather, bodywork is a temporary and situated set of disciplining practices.

The workplace as a silencing space

My research gives insight into the layered complexity of silence and ‘coming out’ in the workplace. In this study, young queer people experienced the workplace as a silencing space. Silence was an ever-present dimension throughout participants’ accounts of negotiating heteronormative work environments and engaging in processes of bodywork. However, this was not an impenetrable form of silence; participants shared their stories of speaking about queer sexualities and, in their own words, ‘coming out’ at work. In

this section, I discuss the three most prominent states of silence within participants' stories and the complexity of 'coming out' in work-relationships. Theoretically, this set of findings illustrates the inadequacy of binary concepts such as in/out, disclosure/non-disclosure and the limited theorising of 'coming out' as a beneficial/dangerous process. These binary divisions do not fully encapsulate the many intricacies of 'coming out' at work.

On an experiential level, these findings demonstrate how young queer people negotiate multiple states of silence, or closets, in the workplace and show that keeping silent is perpetually hard work. For the purpose of this discussion, I refer to the closet metaphor as a signifier of silence and invisibility. Within Western modern cultures, the closet has become a symbolic space of shelter from homosexual oppression. It is a protective, yet confined, space for living in secrecy and concealing non-normative desires and relationships (Seidman et al 2002). My research suggests that we cannot speak of the closet as a singular edifice. Alternatively, the closet has many forms and shapes, as evident in participants' stories of sustaining silence. There were multiple shades of silence woven throughout their work experiences. On this basis, it is more accurate to speak of multiple closets in the workplace.

Multiple closets in the workplace

Queer theorists have argued that the metaphor of the closet is a recurring symbol attached to queer identities (Butler 1991; Fuss 1991; Sedgwick 1990). In the context of contemporary North American society, Seidman (2004) and Seidman et al (2002) contend that many queer individuals are living life 'beyond the closet'; the concealment and repression of queer identities is no longer the dominant preoccupation of their everyday lives. From an Australian context, Hillier & Harrison (2007) argue that for most young queer people 'the closet is still a reality' (p. 85). The findings from my study concur with Hillier and Harrison's (2007) claim.

While Seidman (2004, p. 31) discusses multiple closets in the context of variant social positions across social structures, I discuss the closet as a transient metaphor in which its

definition and meaning continually shifts between work-relationships and cultures. The closet experienced by young people in my study was not a uni-dimensional space. Based on their study of queer employees and work relations, Ward & Winstanley (2003, p. 1276) conclude that silence as a 'negative space' (the space in which things are unsaid) has multiple meanings. The findings from my study support this conclusion. In my analysis of participants' silences in the workplace, I identified three distinct representations of the closet metaphor. This finding suggests that the closet holds wider meaning beyond recognition as a metaphorical space of protection from homosexual oppression. Similarly, Seidman (2004, p. 8) argues that it is more meaningful to consider the closet as a *condition* of social oppression, rather than representing homosexual oppression in its entirety.

In the first state of silence, silence as an intimately shared state, a small group of participants conveyed their experiences of occupying *a shared closet* in which their intimate relationships with other employees were hidden from view. Participants' stories of 'loving in the shadows' highlight the constant stressors involved in maintaining invisible intimate relationships. The shared closet was an intensely tight space for two colleagues to occupy at one time, occasionally resulting in one partner 'outing' the other. This is an illuminating finding because it illustrates the tensions in negotiating shared silences and intimate relationships in the same workplace. Rostosky and Riggle (2002) have examined the tension between the closeted statuses of partners employed in separate work environments. However, in their study there was no consideration of the tensions between sexual partners employed in the *same* workspace. It could be argued that sharing the closet with another employee may increase opportunities for mutual support. This finding suggests otherwise—sharing the closet can create further complications and tensions in sustaining silence. The high level of secrecy surrounding same-sex relationships also re-emphasises the lack of safe spaces, and positive acknowledgment, available to young queer people in negotiating intimate relationships (Russell et al 2001; Trotter 2001).

Additionally, this finding demonstrates how the closet can have facilitating effects. For several young people the cloak of silence enabled them to meet and form new relationships with other queer colleagues. For example, Luke and his boyfriend were able to continue their relationship in secrecy while employed in the same team of

lifesavers. This option may not have been available to them if their relationship was common knowledge. However, this does not diminish the stress of sustaining partnerships under the veil of secrecy. Its functionality was experienced on a temporary basis only.

In the second state of silence, silence as an ambiguous state, several participants had located themselves within *a semi-transparent closet*. This was described as a sexually ambiguous space in which these young people believed that other staff members could potentially interpret their appearance, mannerisms and identities as distinctly queer, without having to name their sexuality aloud. There is an assumption conveyed in their logic that others will 'read' the signs that signify non-heterosexual identities. However, these participants still had to contend with the persistent presumption of heterosexuality, as evident in the research findings. From their research, Woods & Lucas (1993, p. 157) discussed how gay men in corporate workplaces presented themselves as sexually ambiguous to conceal their sexuality. In my research, participants were not intending to completely conceal their sexuality. On the contrary, it was intended for other staff to interpret their sexuality as 'queer' based on presented signifiers, displays and hints. However, by assuming a state of ambiguity this still provided a degree of shielding from unexpected negative responses. This set of findings also illustrates how sexuality has performative elements as a socially constructed force that is *displayed* and *signified* in work-relationships. This compliments Burrell and Hearn's (1989) argument that sexuality is produced in the course of negotiating power relations in the workplace.

In the fourth state of silence, silence as an inescapable state, participants spoke of *a recursive closet*. This closet differs significantly from the previous two closets as participants did not always choose to 'come out' and break their silence on their own terms; other people sometimes made this decision for them. This was a recurring state of silence that several young queer people never quite escaped, despite having discussed and disclosed their sexuality at least once in their work-relationships or having been outed by others. This finding is consistent with Ward & Winstanley's (2003) conclusion that 'coming out' does not automatically dispel the suppressive power of silence. The closet as a recurring space supports Sedgwick's (1990) theoretical proposition that 'coming out' can conveniently reinforce silence and ignorance as a preferred state of knowledge. 'Coming out' does not terminate 'anyone's relation to the closet' but instead

strengthens the ‘power-circuits’ of silence operating within and between sexual discourse (Sedgwick 1990, p. 81).

Negotiating these three closet-spaces suggests a more complex level of decision-making than simply deciding whether to be ‘in’ or ‘out’ at work. The closet can be experienced as a shared yet confined space that brings constraints as well as company, especially when having to consider the privacy and preferences of more than one occupant. The closet is not impermeable; indeed, for some young people its permeability was useful in displaying and signifying their sexuality to others without having to name their sexuality aloud. For some young people, the occupancy of the closet was a preferred choice; for others, their choices were limited. This was especially so when other people in the workplace effectively pushed them back into the closet by greeting their ‘coming out’ with further silence.

The complexity of these three closets reflects how ‘coming out’ cannot be approached as a linear process of progressing from a status of ‘in’ to ‘out’, as often implied within life-span models of homosexual identity development, such as Cass’ (1979) and Troiden’s (1979, 1988) models. Instead, my study shows that ‘coming out’ is a situated, interchangeable and ever-transient process of moving across the epistemological divide between visibility and invisibility. These findings support theoretical discussions of the closet as a perpetually unstable space (Butler 1991, p. 16; Mason 2002, p. 82), what Fuss (1991) has described as the ‘infinitely permeable and shifting boundaries between insides and outsides’ (p. 4). This instability is always present within the binary logic of the in/out binary that accompanies homosexual lives and the ‘coming out’ narrative.

Honesty and truth telling in the workplace

In their discussions of ‘coming out’ at work, participants frequently referred to moral imperatives of honesty versus dishonesty. Speaking about queer sexualities was akin to admitting the sexual truth about the speaker. This set of findings indicates what McLean (2007, p. 154) identifies as the ‘disclosure imperative’ implicit within the cultural idealisation of ‘coming out’: the political and social pressure for queer individuals to

declare their sexuality within a given identity. The disclosure imperative assigns a moral weight to the process of coming out—to be ‘in’ the closet is bad or dishonest, to be ‘out’ of the closet is good or honest (McLean 2007; Rasmussen 2004). The ‘coming out’ narrative is founded on political ideals of sexual liberation through ‘truth-telling’ and revealing the authentic sexual self (Plummer 1995, p. 131). This culturally ingrained imperative to ‘come out’ can place increasing pressure on queer individuals to name and disclose their sexuality, regardless of their social positioning and immediate circumstances (McLean 2007; Seidman et al 2002).

This finding has implications for the social development of young queer people. Moral attributes of honesty and dishonesty invite young people into scripting sexual narratives that are demoralising about the self. Indeed, many participants in this study expressed feeling guilty for choosing not to disclose their sexuality to others. Guilt can be an obstructive emotional response that is far from conducive to sustaining a sense of self-worth. As a cultural ideal, the disclosure imperative has the potential to push young queer people into ‘coming out’, regardless of their circumstances. Participants’ encounters with symbolic and material violence in the workplace demonstrate that the decisions they make in choosing not to discuss their sexuality at work are legitimate choices. These kinds of decision-making processes deserve careful consideration, regardless of whether ‘coming out’ is necessarily a good or bad deed.

Managing the unmanageable: ‘Coming out’ at work

From a queer theoretical position, ‘coming out’ is discussed as an impossible practice to manage because the process of naming queer sexualities to others is never completely free of homophobic logic (Halperin 1995; Sedgwick 1990). For young queer people, processes of identity management and ‘coming out’ symbolise an unending game of hide and seek (Barron & Bradford 2007, p. 237; Telford 2003, p. 135). My research supports all of these arguments. Participants’ stories of disclosure in the workplace demonstrate that the ‘coming out’ process is an extremely unpredictable process to manage. This was evident in my research in two ways.

First, this was apparent through the difficulty in predicting the responses of others. The responses of others potentially brought relief and a sense of validation or alternatively, retrenched feelings of distress and discomfort. This is an important finding as it reinforces Sedgwick's (1990) claim that the moment of 'coming out' holds a 'double-edged potential for injury' (p. 81) that can be met with hostile responses, regardless of the relationships shared with confidants. This raises questions of how prepared young people can be to engage in this disclosure process, especially when reliant on the responses of others. Second, the unpredictability of the 'coming out' process was evident through the spread of workplace gossip and the presumption of others to disclose young people's sexuality without their consent. Within participants' stories, these two processes of information-sharing marked a loss of control over information about their sexual lives. This finding emphasises the difficulties in managing the 'coming out' process, especially when this process is 'managed' by others. This presents new challenges for young queer workers in not being able to predict how gossip and unwelcome discussion about their sexuality might affect their relationships with other staff.

In other Australian studies, workplace gossip and the threat of being 'outed' are reported as forms of 'violence' and 'homophobic behaviour' (Asquith 1999; Irwin 1999).

Undeniably, gossip and the attached risks of being 'outed' by others can be malicious acts that hold devastating consequences for the intended target. This was evident in my research—workplace gossip and the fear of being 'outed' beyond their immediate control were two major concerns for several participants. However, not all young people in my study perceived workplace gossip as alarming or risky. For some young people it was an anticipated and advantageous process. The spread of gossip provided a convenient fountain of knowledge about young queer people's sexual identities; to this extent, it was normalised as an anticipated process of information sharing at work. While not intending to dismiss the distress experienced through losing control over this information, this finding shows that gossip about sexualities can hold different meanings across varying work contexts and relationships.

In spite of the unpredictability of the 'coming out' process, many participants approached the process of disclosure with caution and consideration. This was reflected in their assessment and selection of suitable audiences and in their consideration of appropriate methods of disclosure. This finding is in line with previous discussions of

‘identity management’ as a selective process of disclosure by queer workers (Anastas 2001; Chrobot-Mason et al 2001). It is also consistent with findings from Irwin’s (1999, p. 47) national survey which indicate that over a third of queer respondents (39%) chose to be selectively ‘out’ to others in their workplace, rather than being ‘out’ to everyone. Given that recent studies in psychosexual development suggest that queer adolescents are increasingly identifying as non-heterosexual at an earlier age (Savin-Williams 2005, p. 163), issues around ‘coming out’ and identity management may become increasingly relevant to their first experiences of paid employment.

The workplace as an inclusive space

The workplace was not always experienced as a monolithic culture of heterosexual dominance and normalcy. This research tells an alternative story in which the workplace was also experienced as an inclusive space. This was evident in the many supportive, acknowledging, and inclusive relationships participants shared with other staff members, including members of management. This is consistent with other studies that discuss the potential for workplaces to operate as sexually inclusive environments (Button 2001; Colgan et al 2006; Irwin 1999; Skaines & Cowan 2003). Within Australia, queer respondents have reported ‘positive’ organisations as places that promote diversity and difference and which make employees feel valued for their contributions (Irwin 1999, p. 40). This finding is reflected in my research. In this section, I discuss the significance of this alternative story by elaborating on what participants identified as the critical aspects of inclusive workplaces. Equally, I discuss the aspects that participants did not speak about or discuss as significant—the absence of formalised policies and procedures on inclusion and diversity management.

The critical aspects of inclusive work environments

My study highlights three critical aspects to constructing inclusive work environments: 1) the symbolism of supportive relationships; 2) the demonstration of inclusion through a number of micro-practices; and 3) the fostering of inclusive cultures. These three aspects provide illuminating knowledge of how young people both define and interpret principles and practices of inclusion in the workplace.

This study shows that supportive work-relationships can play a meaningful role in validating the sexuality of young queer workers. For many young people in this study, participation in the workplace brought with it opportunities to receive support and recognition from other staff members. Support was provided by a diverse range of people, including co-workers and managers. Support was extended across work-groups as well as offered in one-to-one relationships, indicating how team-participation can play an instrumental role in affirming the sexuality of queer employees. Supportive relationships were experienced as validating and could be forged under alienating circumstances.

The workplace can have validating functions in young queer people's lives; this degree of validation may not be available in other social settings, such as in the home or at school. For example, two young men discussed how attending work not only provided a comforting distance from family-life but it also brought them opportunities to discuss their sexuality with supportive colleagues. When participants were situated in hostile work environments, this did not curtail the opportunity to establish supportive relationships. For example, Michael found an ally in another male employee who likewise despised the same manager in their department store. Exclusionary practices are not endorsed or supported by all individuals located within sexually exclusive workspaces.

One critical finding was the ways in which young people received support from their supervisors and managers. This finding counter-acts the oppressive relationships discussed earlier in which senior and management staff occupied positions of power, both formally and informally, over young people. It indicates the potential for young queer people to form supportive, trusting, and acknowledging relationships with their

managers. This finding also echoes the results from several other workplace studies that show how senior staff and managers can be a significant provider of support for queer employees (Huffman et al 2008), and how their positive attitudes can be fundamental to the experience of inclusive work cultures (Irwin 1999, p. 41; Colgan et al 2007, p. 71).

Participants in this study described a range of micro-practices that conveyed the inclusive attitudes of other workers. These included expressions of appreciation towards queer employees, witnessing others speak out against homonegativity, hearing co-workers use inclusive language and avoid heterosexist presumptions, and the inclusion of same-sex partners in social events and in everyday conversations. Several young people also identified the ways in which their co-workers made them feel like equals, diminishing any sense of separation based on sexuality. These micro-practices match the expectations of queer workers surveyed in Colgan et al's (2006) qualitative study. Queer respondents from Colgan et al's research discussed how they wanted to be treated at work—three expectations were the avoidance of stereotypes and assumptions, being recognised as equal, and having their sexuality acknowledged and understood. My study illustrates how these expectations can be put into practice. The descriptions provided by young queer people show that these are not complicated or resource-intensive practices for organisations to foster and encourage all employees to undertake. Rather, they are very basic gestures of respect and inclusion.

Some participants in this research identified several primary factors that they considered foundational to their experience of inclusive work cultures. These factors typically revolved around the presence of particular kinds of people in the workplace, people who demonstrated inclusive values and expressed goodwill towards employees, regardless of their differences. For example, Jack discussed the 'alternative' culture of the restaurant in which it felt like everyone was welcome. Jack's reflections suggest that his boss's affirming values were a significant contributor to this queer-friendly culture. This confirms Poverny's (2000) argument that the beliefs and values of organisational leaders play a substantial role in how receptive workplaces are to issues of sexual diversity. Similarly, respondents from Colgan et al's (2006, p. 69) study emphasised the importance of senior employees as positive role models.

Another cultural factor included the ways in which human services and welfare organisations attracted employees with inclusive values and enshrined these values in their organisational charter. Maree's description of her counselling organisation stands out as a commendable example based on the organisation's pro-active stance in seeking to engage with local queer community events. Maree's work-story is consistent with three of Colgan et al's (2006) recommendations for generating inclusive work cultures: 'acknowledge and validate diverse sexualities' (p. 18); 'consult with LGB employees about policy development' (p. 19); and, 'recognise the importance of community outreach and customer focus' (p. 19).

The absence of formal policies and procedures

In Colgan et al's (2006, p. 101) study, a significant concern reported by queer employees was a perceived gap between the existence of inclusive policies and their lack of implementation in practice. Additionally, Button's (2001) research emphasises the role of non-discriminatory policies and practices in reducing incidents of treatment discrimination. In my research findings, I identified a reverse scenario as formal policies and procedures for building inclusive work environments were notably absent from young people's accounts. Participants attributed little significance to formalised policies and procedures of inclusion, diversity management and EO. Instead, my study reiterates the significance of informal rules, attitudes and norms as governing frameworks within work cultures (Skaines & Cowan 2003; Ward & Winstanley 2006). This is in contrast to the wide range of inclusive policies and procedures identified within the workplace literature discussed in Chapter Three (Anastas 2001; Appleby & Anastas 1998; Button 2001; Clair et al 2005; Colgan et al 2006; Day & Schoenrade 2000; Poverny 2000; Ragins & Cornwell 2001; Ragins et al 2003; Seck et al 1993; Wright et al 2006).

This absence can be interpreted in three ways. First, it can be tentatively read as evidence of a policy gap: a lack of formal policies and procedures implemented in participants' current and former workplaces. Second, while participants' workplaces may have these policies and procedures in place they may not have been adequately brought to their attention. Third, participants may be aware of existing policies and procedures however,

the lack of observed compliance to issues of EO and workplace diversity may render these requirements meaningless. For example, several participants recalled viewing EO and anti-harassment policies that included sexuality. For the main part, however, these policies were greeted with cynicism in their capacity to galvanise change. In contrast, the supportive, appreciative and inclusive relationships held with other co-workers, team-members and managers may be demonstrative of a more meaningful organisational reality that has observable, tangible and positive outcomes for young queer workers.

This absence in policy and procedure is a concerning finding, particularly when considering the transitory nature of the workforce. It is not adequate for workplaces to rely on informal expressions of inclusion as these practices are based on work-relationships that can easily change, depending on the movements and turnover of staff. The effective implementation of workplace diversity and inclusion policies and procedures ensures that: a) informal gestures and expressions of support and inclusion, and collectively-shared values, are formally cemented into the foundations of organisational cultures and not reliant on individual goodwill; and b) policies and procedures back-up existing expressions of inclusion and support that hold concrete meaning from the perspective of young people.

The workplace as a sexually diverse space

The final significant discussion for this study examines the context of working in sexually diverse space. Within these workspaces, participants were not the only visibly queer people employed. Participants recounted their varied experiences of working with other non-heterosexual colleagues and members of management. These experiences revolved around relationships of connection, validation and support balanced against relationships of difference and division. The variance in these relationships is striking because it invites rethinking of shared identities as taken-for-granted sources of support and it demonstrates how sexually diverse workplaces can operate as both validating and exclusionary environments.

Shared and fractured identities in the workplace

For some young people in this study, queer colleagues provided a sense of reassurance, companionship and mutual support. This finding highlights the validating benefits these relationships can bring for the social and sexual development of young people in their late adolescence and early twenties. This may be particularly beneficial for young people during a critical time when they are making sense of their sexual difference in a hetero-centric world. In some instances, the visible presence of queer colleagues gave reassurance that identifying as non-heterosexual in the workplace was an okay and permissible experience. At other times, it brought opportunities to extend 'queer' social networks. For some young people, queer colleagues were a valuable source of support. For example, during his late teens, Luke appreciated the mentoring relationship he had shared with an older gay man working in the same restaurant. This relationship gave reassurance to Luke that it was 'alright' to be gay as well as providing him with a source of personal support in a trying work culture.

Conversely, other young people in my study acknowledged the presence of other queer colleagues but did not share any point of connection. Instead, a small group of participants noted the differences and divisions between themselves and other queer workers. At the other end of the scale, their respective queer managers had treated two young people in a discriminatory and sexually denigrating way. Kat explained how her 'closeted' manager had unfairly dismissed her *because* of her queer identity while Joseph has learnt to endure and, to some degree, make use of the sexualised behaviour of his boss. These two accounts illustrate the differences in organisational power between queer employees and their queer managers. While this power-relationship may be contestable, the greater authority and capacity to exercise power over others, both formally and informally, lies with their respective managers.

Kat's story illustrates not only a divided relationship between her 'closeted' boss and herself but also their different relationships to the closet. Kat does not rely on the protective walls of the closet during her employment at the pet shop however, her boss remains situated inside its protective walls. Kat's visibly queer presence in the workplace threatens the layer of invisibility provided by her boss's closet. In consequence, it is Kat

who is punished for her visibility. This act of discrimination illustrates again the cultural ubiquity of homonegativity (Russell & Bohan 2006); queer individuals are not immune from reiterating its pervasive and oppressive logic against other queer bodies. Similarly, Kheva's recounted experiences highlight how queer workers participating in the same workplace can share very different relationships to the closet depending on their individual and social circumstances. In his current employment, Kheva had become the confidant to two older queer women who did not believe they could be 'out' in the workplace to the same extent as Kheva. These stories also show how queer workers can experience the same work environment in very different ways. This finding fractures the cohesiveness of queer identities as a basis for shared or common experience.

Social divisions between queer employees were also evident in Shirley's observations of organisational hierarchies. This finding highlights how queer employees can be located in varying positions of equality in the same workplace. Shirley had observed how gay-identifying men in sexually diverse work-teams were more likely than women employees to quickly advance up the corporate ladder. This suggests that sexually diverse spaces are not immune from hetero-patriarchal practices in which male workers, regardless of their sexuality, remain privileged over female workers. This finding further fractures the cohesiveness of queer identities.

Seidman (1993) has argued that 'Queers are not united by a unitary identity but only by their opposition to disciplining, normalising social forces' (p. 133). In this statement, Seidman emphasises the heterogeneity of queer populations whose only common basis is the shared impact of heterosexual hegemony. Sexual identities cannot always be relied on as stable or unifying subject positions; social identities can equally function as points of exclusion and difference as well as points of support, unity and collective action (Butler 1993; Kirsch 2006; Weeks 2003b; Yep 2003). Therefore, the potential for queer employees to connect, unite and provide each other with support should not be taken for granted. This is a critical point as it troubles other organisational studies that advocate for the advantages and benefits of queer-support networks, groups and mentoring programs in large organisations (Button 2001; Colgan et al 2006; Poverny 2000; Ragins et al 2003; Seck et al 1993). In particular, Colgan et al's (2006) study of UK workplaces gives emphasis to queer groups and networks as avenues for support and organisational change, although their findings also acknowledge reported tensions within these groups

based on differences in gender, ability and industry. LGBT groups and networks may not always be sufficient or reliable providers of support or meet the requirements of individual queer workers.

It is important to recognise that for some young queer workers the knowledge that such networks and groups exist, and the awareness of other visibly queer colleagues, may alone be a significant source of affirmation and reassurance. This may be particularly meaningful for newcomers to unfamiliar work environments and for young workers located in fragmented work cultures in which some work-relationships may be more problematic than others. Colgan et al's (2006, p. 93) findings show that queer groups and networks can provide an important avenue of support against discrimination and harassment. However, they are by no means the only source of support. The cohesiveness of queer identities is further fractured when accounting for the differential treatment between queer men and women and between younger and older workers within queer-majority workplaces.

Exclusive encounters in queer-majority workplaces

My research shows that queer-majority workplaces can in effect operate as both inclusive and exclusive environments. Participants working in queer-majority workplaces experienced these environments along varying lines of inclusion and exclusion. While some young people reported feeling appreciated as non-heterosexual employees, others equally felt dismissed, unacknowledged, and in one instance, bullied based on their differences in social and organisational status. This is a revealing set of findings when considering that many of the workplace studies presented in Chapter Three chiefly focus on queer workers' experiences as marginal workers located in majority spaces. These findings shed light on the experiences of queer workers located in queer-majority workplaces.

Within queer-majority workplaces, queer sexualities were inscribed as the social norm. This was evident in Kat's story of working in an inner-city gay bar. Kat discussed not having to worry about reactions to her sexuality from customers and workers within this

‘gayed’ space. In other accounts, queer-majority workplaces operated as inclusive environments that appreciated its employees as non-heterosexual individuals but did not always value its workers across other differences in social status. For example, Ruby reported feeling frequently ignored and unacknowledged as a queer woman working in what was predominantly a gay-male work sector. This highlights how sexually homogenous workplaces, whether configured around gay or heterosexual subjectivities, can operate as marginalising spaces for employees who are situated outside the privileged centre.

Other studies have discussed the implications of work-based discrimination along intersecting lines of ethnicity, ability, gender and class (Chung 2003; Colgan et al 2006; Irwin 1999; McDermott 2006; Rosabal 1996). The findings of my study suggest that young people in queer-majority workplaces do not necessarily experience discrimination or harassment because of their sexuality. They are treated unequally, both directly and indirectly, because of other intersecting social divisions. From a sociological perspective, Weeks (2003b) argues that the body is a site of multiple differences in social status and power relations, contained within social markings such as gender, class and sexuality: ‘... [the body] is the site for the inscription of difference, the battleground for conflicting cultural meanings’ (p. 126). Accordingly, the power negotiated within workplace interactions and relationships can be conceived as a ‘complex series of interlocking practices’ (Weeks 2003a, p. 39). In the context of my research, this results in differential treatment for queer workers situated across variant social positions that stand outside the social ‘core’ of established work cultures, for example because of differences in age and/or gender.

My study highlights how queer-majority workplaces were sometimes located in larger organisations that were configured around multiple work cultures; this provided limited protection from the exclusionary treatment of other employees. This was demonstrated in Bruce’s and Pearson’s stories of inclusion in queer-majority teams and crews whilst encountering homonegative treatment from co-workers and customers located outside these inclusive circles. These queer work-teams acted as buffer zones that provided limited protection from harassment and discrimination. However, as Bruce discovered, once you moved outside the circle, the same level of support and validation was no longer available. This has implications for the organisational welfare of young queer

people transitioning between teams and departments within large organisations, particularly if directed to move against their preference.

A final point of discussion is that workplace discrimination should not always be interpreted through a framework of sexuality and gender alone. Alex's experiences of mistreatment within a queer-owned and managed cafe resonates with previous literature on workplace bullying, more so than focusing on sexuality and gender as mitigating factors. Workplace bullying has been flagged and documented as a concern for many young people in the Australian labour market, across industry and employment status (McDonald et al 2007). Hodson et al (2006, p. 385) discuss the concept of 'relational powerlessness' in which positions of lower status in the workplace heightens vulnerability to bullying behaviours. Factors that increase powerlessness include membership in a marginalised social group, lack of job security or limited work-skills (Hodson et al 2006). In my study, and especially in the case of Alex, youth and limited experience are two potential markers of increased vulnerability to workplace bullying.

Concluding comments to this chapter

This discussion has examined how the findings of this study contribute to and extend the knowledge base of sexuality and the workplace. The central contribution of this research is in highlighting the complexity for young queer workers in negotiating multiple dimensions in the workplace. This chapter has discussed how as a *sexually exclusive space*, the workplace can be configured as a heteronormative environment and as a site of violence and discrimination that carries subjectifying and homonegative messages about young queer bodies. Within *regulatory* and *silencing spaces*, young queer workers are routinely required to adhere to self-disciplining processes of bodywork and to negotiate multiple closets to sustain their invisibility, and therefore safety, as queer workers. As an *inclusive space*, the workplace can hold supportive, validating and equalising functions for young queer workers, demonstrated through informal gestures and expressions (rather than formal measures) from co-workers and managers alike.

Working in *sexually diverse spaces* can bring opportunities to work alongside other queer employees as a source of reassurance, mutual support and sexual affirmation. However, these spaces, inclusive of queer-majority workplaces, are not immune from the exercise of power across other lines of inequality such as gender, age and organisational authority.

This discussion has also brought attention to the multifarious effects of working across these five dimensions. Exclusionary and regulatory workspaces held constraining effects over young queer workers' capacity to speak unreservedly about their sexuality without negative reprisal, and to participate in their employment on equal footing with other workers. Conversely, both these spaces had enabling effects by compelling young people to refute and resist homonegative expressions, heteronormative assumptions and the regulatory gaze of others. Silencing spaces similarly suppressed the voices and visible identities of young queer workers while also facilitating limited opportunities for forming intimate relationships under the protective veil of secrecy and for quietly signifying queer sexualities to others. Finally, inclusive and sexually diverse spaces had validating effects in making young people feel valued as queer subjects. However, sexually diverse spaces also held exclusionary effects that devalued young people's participation and contributions on the basis of other social and organisational differences. Ultimately, this research demonstrates that work environments and relationships have the potential to operate as exclusive *and* inclusive environments for young queer workers. This central finding conveys a problematic story on one hand while bringing hope and solutions on the other.

In the following and final chapter of this thesis, I elaborate on the implications of this discussion for wider organisational change, for the provision of support to young queer workers, and for social work practice and knowledge. This includes identified areas for future research in the overlapping fields of sexuality, youth and the workplace.

CHAPTER NINE

Conclusion: The labour of negotiating multiple workspaces

Introduction to the chapter

The main conclusion of this study is that young queer workers experienced the workplace as a multi-dimensional space that expanded across five divergent and overlapping dimensions. The findings of this study show that the workplace was experienced by young queer workers as 1) a sexually exclusive space; 2) a regulatory space; 3) a silencing space; 4) an inclusive space; and 5) a sexually diverse space. This is in accordance with the research question that led this inquiry: *How do young people experience the workplace as queer workers?* This study gives a nuanced understanding of young queer workers' experiences in the workplace while building on the existing literature in which the workplace is commonly discussed as a problematic setting for queer workers, as reviewed in Chapter Three (Asquith 1999; Badgett 1996; Button 2001; Chrobot-Mason et al 2001; Colgan et al 2006; Druzin et al 1998; Emslie 1998; Fassinger 1995; Frank 2006; GLAD 1994; Griffith & Hebl 2002; Humphrey 1999; Hunt & Dick 2008; Irwin 1999; Levine & Leonard 1984; McCreery & Krupat 1999; McCreery 1999; Powers 1996; Ragins & Cornwell 2001; Ragins et al 2003; Rondahl et al 2007; Rostosky & Riggle 2002; Russ et al 2002; Shallenberger 1994; Skidmore 2004; Smith & Ingram 2004; Spradlin 1998; Taylor & Raeburn 1995; Waldo 1999; Ward & Winstanley 2003, 2006; Woods & Lucas 1993).

This study has shed light on the complexity and the labour of negotiating queer sexualities across workplace settings that have the capacity to operate as both exclusive and inclusive environments. Having to negotiate these environments heightens the daily stressors of entering the workforce for young people and constitutes a secondary form of labour that is not financially rewarded or acknowledged. This study has also illustrated how the workplace can have both enabling and constraining effects on the working-lives

of young queer employees: constraining effects that are exclusionary, suppressive, and disciplining; and, enabling effects that are mobilising, facilitating, and validating.

The findings of this research also raise broader concerns regarding the configuration of the workplace as a sexual and gendered environment. This research has shown how the workplace can be structured as both a sexually exclusive and inclusive space, as represented in the participants' stories. As an exclusive space, the workplace can be configured as a heteronormative environment. This environment is sustained through a range of symbolically and materially violent practices which reiterate the normalcy of heterosexual relations while reinforcing the sexual otherness of non-heterosexual subjectivities. These practices illustrate how the modern cultural logic of the heterosexual/homosexual binary can permeate the human relations of the workplace and can preserve social divisions between heterosexual and non-heterosexual workers. This is further evident in the subjectification of young queer workers as 'bad workers' through acts of work-based discrimination; these acts convey wider Western ideals of 'the worker' as not only a male subject but also a heterosexual subject. Conversely, this research has also shown how the heterosexual/homosexual binary is not a stable or impenetrable social divide in the workplace. The structuring of the workplace as an inclusive space demonstrates how organisational relationships, teams and cultures can transcend this binary division and how employees and organisational leaders can foster respect and appreciation for sexual diversity.

In this chapter, I return to the purpose of the study outlined in Chapter One—to generate a detailed description of young queer people's experiences in the workplace for informing changes in organisational policy and practice, and for informing the knowledge base of social work. First, I discuss the implications of the research findings in response to the aims of the study. Second, I identify the implications of these findings for organisational policy and practice and for social work knowledge and practice. Third, I consider the limitations of the present study and identify directions for future research. To conclude, I reflect on the researcher's journey throughout this study by returning to my work-experiences canvassed in the Preface. These reflections conclude this thesis.

The implications of undertaking secondary labour in the workplace

First, this study aimed to learn how young people experienced their place of employment as queer workers. In Chapter Three, I examined how previous studies spoke of the workplace as a predominantly-problematic site for queer workers. My study told a similar but more intricate story as young queer people in this research experienced the workplace as both an exclusive (and therefore, problematic) and inclusive environment. There were many layers of shading to their recounted experiences. From their stories, the workplace was experienced as a multi-dimensional space that could be potentially exclusive, silencing, regulatory, inclusive, and sexually diverse. These five dimensions were not experienced as mutually exclusive as they overlapped and converged within participants' stories. These convergences add a level of complexity to young queer people's participation in the workplace. As paid workers, these young people are expected to undertake a secondary process of intense and often unpredictable labour in negotiating numerous workspaces that other workers, namely heterosexual workers, are not required to perform to the same laborious extent.

Undertaking this secondary process of labour can affect young queer people's work-relationships, entry into the workplace, their sense of self and their future career-plans. It presents challenges for young people in forming work-relationships, and placing trust in other employees. For example, how do young queer workers place trust and confidence in their co-workers when some relationships are experienced as exclusionary while others are experienced as inclusive? It can generate anxieties for young queer workers in feeling prepared for entering new work environments. For instance, what are the implications for young queer employees who are required to move from an inclusive to an exclusive work culture? It also complicates the development of an affirmative sense of identity. How do young people formulate an affirming sense of self as non-heterosexual individuals when working across these contrasting workspaces? This is further complicated when young workers may receive conflicting messages about the value, validity and status of their sexuality, or experience the subjectifying and normalising effects of symbolic and material violence and discrimination. These

subjectifying effects may also unduly influence and constrain the career plans of young queer workers as they begin their work trajectories. How do young people formulate fulfilling vocational goals while feeling alienated and marginalised in their current and previous work environments?

These hard questions highlight the many potential stressors for young queer people as newcomers to the labour market. Having to negotiate the multiple work dimensions discussed in this study, particularly across exclusionary environments, may also heighten the ‘precariousness’ of their employment as young workers (White & Wyn 2008, p. 174). As the contemporary labour market becomes increasingly fragmented, destandardised and casualised, the reality is that young people will be required to work across several workplaces in their lifetime and perhaps at the same time. This increases the likelihood of having to negotiate multiple workspaces during their first few years of employment.

In Chapter Two, I examined the narrative-streams that have informed the literature about the everyday lives of young queer people. Two of these streams focused on young queer people as suffering subjects in a homonegative world, and as agents of change who transcend homonegative beliefs and practices. This study straddles both these narrative-streams. In this research-narrative, young queer people are positioned as silenced, victimised and invisible subjects across heteronormative and homonegative work environments. This research-narrative also highlights how young queer people negotiate these problematic environments as agents of change. The findings show how their experiences of symbolic and material violence propelled them into enacting strategies geared towards change. The research-narrative tells a third kind of story about young queer workers. Within inclusive workspaces, young queer people are positioned as equal, supported and respected employees. In this sense, they are no less ordinary than other staff. This is an important acknowledgement given that Savin-Williams (2005) reminds us not to ignore the ‘ordinariness’ of young queer lives in social and developmental research. Within inclusive work environments, young queer people are removed from the disciplining processes of bodywork and do not feel required to stay silent or invisible. On the contrary, they are permitted to be ‘ordinary’, equal and openly queer workers.

The second aim of this study was to examine how work-relationships and dynamics impacted on the working lives of young queer people. In regards to the health and

wellbeing of young queer employees, this study has supported the findings of other workplace studies of queer workers' health, presented in Chapter Three (Driscoll et al 1996; Irwin 1999; Smith & Ingram 2004; Waldo 1999). My research reinforces the multiple and cumulative effects of heteronormative and homonegative injury. In addition, this research has flagged concerns for the potential trauma of having to witness homonegative violence and discrimination in the workplace. These findings have implications for service providers supporting queer employees recovering from homonegative violence, including social workers. Symptoms of material violence and discrimination can negatively affect numerous aspects of paid workers' psychosocial health, including their emotional and financial health. These accumulated injuries may not be readily apparent after immediate encounters with homonegative abuse.

Young queer workers can sustain numerous injuries from participating in regulatory and silencing workspaces—injury to their sense of identity and self-worth as non-heterosexual individuals, and to their sense of competence as paid employees. It is unreasonable to expect young employees to effectively perform their appointed work-roles and successfully execute their work-duties while labouring under the self-regulating processes of bodywork and having to sustain silence about their sexuality. These additional demands are crippling of both their productivity as workers and their self-esteem as queer individuals who receive little or no acknowledgment of an integral aspect of their identity-narratives. The inability to carry out a prescribed work role or duty may reinforce a dual sense of failure as both queer subjects and paid employees.

Fear and concern for safety were two prominent themes that appeared at numerous points across the research findings, particularly in the context of working in sexually exclusive workplaces and, more specifically, in the context of working with children and adolescents. Young people have the right to participate in the workplace in safety, without the fear of violence and discrimination and without having to bear witness to other employees' mistreatment and persecution. In the latter context, children and adolescents can be the political conduits through which discourses of protection and endangerment are amplified. These discourses can instill immobilising responses of fear and anxiety in young queer workers who are employed as their caregivers and teachers. This can threaten their sense of safety and security as employees as well as comprising their attentiveness towards the younger people in their care.

Arguably, the emotional response of fear can be interpreted as an acquired coping mechanism in being sensitive to and anticipating homonegativity. Likewise, concerns for personal safety may encourage young people to protect themselves from harm. At the same time, these two themes are a sad indictment that young people have to participate in their employment in fear and anxiety—all young people should be able to participate in work-relationships without fear or anticipation of abusive and unfair treatment. These disquieting themes illustrate how heteronormative and homonegative work cultures and relationships contravene human rights to ‘just and favourable conditions of work’ (UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948, ‘Article 23’) and, in doing so, compromise the entitlement of queer workers to participate in meaningful, fulfilling and safe employment.

Implications for workplace policy and organisational practice

The capacity of young queer people to generate change in their workplaces lies at the heart of this study’s findings, whether it is changes in their work-relationships, changes in how they participate in particular work cultures or changes in their employment status. The young people in this research did not rely on formalised policies and procedures as mechanisms for change. The majority of these young people did not seek external legal support through equal opportunity (EO) commissions or industrial support through trade unions. Rather, they sought to enact change on their own terms. Through their reflected experiences, young people identified a range of basic, informal practices, which made them feel included and appreciated in the workplace as well as clearly articulating the kinds of practices that made them feel uncomfortable, unsafe and excluded. While young employees may lack experience in paid employment, there is much to be learnt from their reflections about the workplace.

The most significant implication of this study is the capacity for employers and organisations to learn from the insights of young queer employees. There is a wealth of informal knowledge in their stories, what could be referred to as ‘subjugated knowledge’

(Hartmann 1992) from a Foucauldian standpoint, on how workplaces can manage diversity in a socially just and inclusive manner. These insights are a valuable organisational resource. Managers, employers and other workplace leaders need to consider how they recognise, appreciate and listen to these potential contributions from their young queer employees. This includes consideration of how organisations can nurture safe environments in which young queer employees, indeed all queer employees, feel safe in speaking about their sexuality and sharing this informal knowledge.

Organisational change does not occur in a social vacuum and young people should not have the sole responsibility of enacting change without wider support and protection. This study confirms that there is still a lot of work to be done before workplaces become safe places for young queer workers, let alone inclusive spaces. In the following discussion, I identify a number of key areas for potential change on an organisational level and on a wider macro level in relation to state and federal legislation. This focus on change is in fulfillment of the imperative for social work research, and social research in general, to have a transformative dimension (Angen 2000; D'Cruz & Jones 2004).

The findings of this study suggest the need to strengthen measures of legal protection for young queer workers in Australia. As flagged in Chapter Three, queer employees in Australia are chiefly reliant on state and territory EO laws that vary in their consistency and capacity to effectively address workplace issues of sexuality and discrimination (Maddison & Partridge 2006). While employers have general responsibilities under state and territory EO legislation to provide harassment and discrimination-free environments, it is not a legislated commitment for organisations to address wider issues of structural and social inequality that shape workplace relations (Chapman 1996; Morgan 1996). There may be value in extending to a federal level what Colgan et al (2006) identify as the 'legal compliance approach' to workplace diversity. For example, this could be achieved through implementing an overarching federal EO Act that consolidates existing state and territory laws; overrides religious or other institutional exemptions operating in current state and territory laws; introduces a series of workplace standards on diversity management that organisations are legally bound to comply with; and outlaws discrimination on the grounds of both sexual identity and consensual sexual activity. This is in recognition that not all queer employees identify with sexual identity

categories but are still entitled to legal protection from sexuality-based discrimination (McCreery 1999).

At an organisational level, this study has identified the requirement for workplaces to focus on the delivery of demonstrative policies and work practices that will aid in the development of more inclusive environments. Policy implementation is required to cement inclusive values, attitudes, and practices into organisational frameworks and to ensure that it is brought to the attention of all employees. To ensure that inclusive values and principles are agreed to and respected by all employees, organisations could utilise recruitment pathways, such as employment agencies and job interviews, to clearly communicate the values-stance of the organisation. Likewise, senior staff and members of management need to be appointed not only on the basis of their skill-level but also on their capacity to uphold the inclusive values and principles of the organisation. This study has shown how young workers may look to their organisational leaders for supportive and responsive action; they should not be greeted with abuse and discrimination.

To help progress and monitor the implementation of inclusive policies and practices, organisations that are sufficiently resourced could establish diversity groups: advocacy and educational groups and networks that are not configured around a singular social identity. These groups could encompass a range of employee groups that affiliate with socially marginalised identities and communities, including queer representatives. Diversity groups could be founded on a common commitment to valuing social diversity and addressing processes of social exclusion in the workplace. It is important for diversity groups to be non-subjective, that is to say, not organised around a single identity affiliation. This is in recognition that minority workers rarely identify with a singular source of social marginalisation, such as youth, gender or sexuality. There is great potential for employees from varying social backgrounds to work collaboratively in addressing organisational issues that thwart the respect of social diversity.

Diversity groups may have identifiably 'queer' representatives that other queer employees can access in confidence and trust if required. However, it should not be the sole responsibility of queer employees always to provide support and education in relation to issues of sexual diversity. This study has discussed how this can be a

burdensome responsibility that may magnify queer employees sense of marginality and isolation in the workplace. It has also been recognised that not all queer employees are in a suitable position to offer mutual support and mentorship to others.

This study has provided evidence that workplaces need to dismantle heteronormative work cultures to ensure that queer employees feel not only included but also on equal standing with other staff. This entails troubling the hetero-centric culture of organisational life. I am not contending that all heterosexual expressions and signifiers should be removed or banished from the workplace. This kind of punitive logic only succeeds in mirroring rationalist perceptions of the workplace as an asexual space (Burrell & Hearn 1989; Schultz 2003). It is dominant cultures of heterosexual normalcy that generate interpersonal boundaries for queer employees; cultures in which queer employees feel they cannot openly discuss their sexuality with others. The micro-practices of inclusion, outlined by the young people in this research, provide a solid foundation for addressing monosexual cultures and dismantling heteronormative work practices. The generation of such simple practices should not be compromised by competing libertarian arguments of majority entitlement over minority rights, which Brickell (2005) has identified as indicative of wider heterosexist discourse. Alternatively, the expression of these everyday practices should be encouraged in equal recognition and respect of all employees, regardless of the 'sexual ratio' of the workplace.

Some of these identified areas for change could be challenging to implement. The stories of young people in this study give sufficient evidence to suggest that such measures could be met with considerable resistance in some work cultures and sectors. Hence, external lobby and interest groups may be needed to assist in advocating for workplace change. There is a significant role for interest and lobby groups, such as LGBT rights groups, to argue for workplaces to integrate values of social justice and sexuality-based equality into their organisational practices. For example, the adoption and circulation of a similar corporate framework to Stonewall's Workplace Equality Index (2008) from the UK could provide a valuable tool for inviting businesses and organisations into a change agenda. However, this evaluative tool needs to be orientated towards a community-diversity approach rather than being driven by a business or market-based approach that neglects the moral dimensions of workplace diversity (Konrad 2003; Noon 2007; Prasad et al 2006). Trade union groups may likewise have a part to play in lobbying for

organisational change with the advantage of having leeway in accessing specific work sectors and industrial cultures. However, this pathway needs to be cautiously balanced against the recognition that unions at present have dwindling significance in younger generations' work-lives (McDonald et al 2007).

As agents of change, there is a role for social workers to actively lobby for more inclusive and equitable conditions in the workplace, particularly in recognition of unequal participation in the workplace as a human rights and social justice concern. The Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) is appropriately positioned to undertake this form of lobbying, at least in targeting current health, welfare and community agencies that employ its members as a beginning point. Social workers are also suitably positioned to assist in the implementation of workplace diversity measures as advocates of change. This affirms earlier calls from social work authors in the organisational literature (Mor Barak 2000; Poverny 2000; Seck et al 1993). Social workers can apply their core skills in advocacy, counselling and community education to bring about change in the workplace as a significant field of practice. For example, this could be realised through the role of employee assistant officers, as previously discussed by Poverny (2000). Practitioners working directly with young people must ensure that their clients are supported in their transition from schooling into paid employment, are fully informed of their rights and responsibilities in the workplace, and feel confident to query how their organisation provides a safe and discriminatory-free space for its employees.

Implications for social work theory and practice

This research makes four significant contributions to social work knowledge and practice. First, this study contributes to social work knowledge about the everyday lives of young queer people and the life-challenges they face when participating in homonegative and heteronormative social settings. A key contribution is the dual recognition of young queer people as victims of abuse, violence, and discrimination in the workplace and as

agents of change in refuting and resisting homonegative discourses. This extends social work knowledge of young queer people beyond deficit-models of youth sexuality as ‘endangered’ or ‘dangerous’ (O’Brien 1999) or as diseased and distressed (Trotter 2001). It also reinforces appreciation for the strengths, resilience, and resourcefulness of young queer people, which has been previously identified in social work literature (see, for example, Anderson 1998). Further, this study gives voice to young queer subjects as speakers of ‘subjugated knowledge’ (Hartmann 1992; O’Brien 1999), informal knowledge-claims that are frequently overshadowed by wider heterosexist discourses on sexuality.

Second, this study builds on existing social work literature examining how heteronormative discourses and dominant ideas of sexual normalcy are sustained in various social work settings and fields of practice (Hicks 2006; Hughes 2006; Hylton 2005; Irwin 2008; McPhail 2004). The present study draws on the concepts of symbolic and material violence to articulate how workplaces are configured as heteronormative environments. The findings of this thesis sensitise social work practitioners to the nuances of symbolic and material violence and the practices through which organisations are constructed as sexually exclusive spaces. This research invites practitioners to critically reflect on how their own organisations may be configured as heteronormative environments, and on how agencies may be more inclusive to both service consumers and colleagues alike.

Third, on a theoretical level this study has complemented other authors in critical social work by further disturbing dominant assumptions about gender and sexuality and by incorporating queer theoretical trends in rethinking social work knowledge (Hicks & Watson 2003; Hicks 2005, 2008; Hughes 2006; LaSala 2007a; McPhail 2004; O’Brien 1999). This study has troubled the dichotomous logic of in/out that lies at the centre of the ‘coming out’ narrative and suggested that ‘coming out’ is a considerably more convoluted process. In this research, ‘coming out’ was discussed as an interchangeable and ever-transient process of moving across the epistemological divide between visibility and invisibility. In addition, findings from this study reiterate the significance of the closet as a relevant metaphor to young queer people’s lives. The closet is considered to have numerous forms in the workplace context, depending on the social circumstances in which young queer workers are situated.

In relation to social work practice, the main emphasis in providing support to young queer people should not be on how prepared young people are to 'come out' at work or in other social settings. Neither should practitioners assume that young queer people automatically engage in a process of 'coming out'. An alternative emphasis could be on whether 'coming out' and disclosing queer sexualities in settings such as the workplace, is always warranted and, indeed beneficial. Practitioners need to explore and unpack with young people the implicit imperatives to 'come out' that may emerge in their storytelling of queer sexualities. This entails inviting young people to reflect on how useful these wider cultural ideals may be in consideration of their immediate circumstances.

The findings of this study also challenge dominant assumptions of queer identities as a taken-for-granted source of unity, support and cohesion. This was demonstrated through the rifts, tensions and differences present in work-relationships between some queer workers. This finding lends support to other social work authors who have questioned the common perception of LGBT groups and communities as homogenous social collectives that bear resemblance to cultural minority groups (Hicks & Watson 2003; Hicks 2005). For social work practitioners, this holds implications for working with lesbian and gay groups and communities in several respects. It is important to recognise the limitations as well as the strengths of working for change with groups and communities in which the only shared basis of commonality is sexual identity. It is also critical to acknowledge the fractures within queer groups and networks and the wider social inequalities that permeate these communities. This includes appreciating that not all queer people are in a suitable position to provide support to other non-heterosexual individuals and groups.

Fourth, the use of online interviewing as a qualitative research method has significant implications in broadening the accessibility of social work services to hard-to-reach social groups, such as young queer people and other marginalised populations. The flexibility, anonymity and autonomy provided by online communication tools, such as instant messaging programs, may be highly suitable for client-groups that face social and geographical barriers to seeking formal support. It may be a particularly useful tool for engaging with young queer people, as many young people are already proficient in using Internet technologies for 'rehearsing' queer identities online and connecting with other queer peers (Hillier & Harrison 2007; Hillier et al 2001). This implication extends

previous discussions of the utility of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) and ‘Web 2.0’ in social work interventions and research practices (Hunt 2002; McAullife 2003; McCoyd & Kerson 2006; Parrott & Madoc-Jones 2008; Schembri 2008). Having said this, online communication may not be a suitable tool across all practice-contexts, for example, in the provision of immediate support in crisis interventions.

Limitations of the present study

The strengths of the present study are two-fold. First, this research is developed from a diverse sample group that spans across industries and Australian states and reflects a diverse range of stories about young queer people’s working lives. This level of diversity was achieved through applying the multiple methods of recruitment and data generation outlined in Chapter Four. Second, the interview accounts of young people participating in this research tell a rich and multifaceted story about their experiences at work. This was achieved through the implementation of qualitative interviewing methods, and by staying attuned to the nuances and complexities of young people’s interpretations and perceptions of the workplace during the process of data analysis. There are however limitations to the scope of the present study.

A conspicuous gap within this study’s sample was the lack of participants employed in trade occupations. This could reflect limitations in advertising and recruitment. This may also be connected to the limitations of Internet-based research—the Internet is not equally accessible for all young people in Australia. Indeed, only a small proportion of the global population have private Internet access, limiting the range of users to wealthier households in socioeconomically advantaged nations (Markham 2005, p. 802). This inequity is evident in Australian homes with 37% of households in the lower-income bracket having access to the Internet at home in comparison to 93% of households in the highest-income bracket (ABS 2006–07, cat. no. 8146.0). Online participation is also restricted to participants having a reasonable degree of skill in computer literacy (Mann & Stewart 2000, p. 29). Some young people in other states

outside of Tasmania may have felt deterred from participating because of this requirement.

A second gap was notable in the absence of young people aged sixteen to seventeen. This could be interpreted as this younger age group lacking experience in employment and therefore lacking confidence in discussing workplace scenarios with an unfamiliar researcher. Another explanation is that it may be too intimidating or confronting for some young people in this age-group to participate in a project in which they are required to identify themselves as 'not straight' to an unfamiliar audience. Other researchers in the field of youth and sexuality have advertised through the mainstream media to attract a younger age group that may not identify with queer affiliations or networks in comparison to their older queer peers (see Hillier et al 1998; Hillier et al 2005). Limited resources in the present study prevented me from pursuing a more widespread advertising strategy.

None of the young people within this study's sample identified as transgender. While young people who identify as transgender may have participated in the research without my awareness, for instance through online participation, no issues relating to transgender identities emerged in the data. This gap can be attributed to my conceptualisation of the research as I sought to chiefly focus on issues of sexual difference, rather than issues pertaining to transitions in gender. Gayle Rubin (1984, p. 308) has argued that sexuality and gender should be approached as two distinct sources of social marginalisation, and to a certain degree, autonomous systems of stratification. While it is important to recognise the many points of interconnection between sexuality and gender, as discussed in this thesis, it is equally important to appreciate how these separate systems of oppression can have differing material effects. Other authors have identified unique challenges for transgender employees in negotiating the exhaustive process of transitioning between gender identities while seeking to sustain work-relationships and retain paid employment (Anastas 1998; Chung 2003; Schilt & Connell 2007). These issues warrant further investigation in research that specifically honours the experiences of younger transgender-identifying people negotiating paid employment and the workplace.

A fundamental limitation that accompanies any qualitative methodology is the capacity for findings to be generalised to other contexts outside the parameters of the study. In this sense, I cannot speak about my study's findings as either replicable or representative of wider trends. Indeed, from a constructivist standpoint there is no intention to generate wider truth statements about the social world (Crotty 1998, p. 47). The emphasis in qualitative research is on generating comprehensive and situated understandings of the research problem (Rubin & Babbie 1997, p. 414). Furthermore, qualitative findings are generalised through their contributions to theory building and in identifying further areas for exploration (Alston & Bowles 1998, p. 10). The strengths of this study demonstrate that these requirements have been met.

Identified areas for future research

This thesis had addressed a significant gap in the field of young people, sexuality and the workplace. In the process, it has opened up additional questions for further research. The findings and implications of this study present exciting possibilities for research in social work. I have identified three topic areas for future inquiry.

The first area for future research involves building on what young people in this study identified as the critical aspects of inclusive work environments. This could entail a broader study in charting what constitutes queer-friendly and inclusive work environments in Australian workplaces. This could be realised by using case study methods to identify a range of organisations across industries that reportedly provide sexually inclusive spaces. An initial descriptive survey circulated across large employers could assist in locating suitable case studies. Practices, both formal and informal, and policies that contribute to inclusive workplaces could be charted by using several methods such as key informant interviews, policy and procedure audits and employee focus groups. This mapping exercise could generate an informative basis for developing practice standards for other organisations to implement, and should ideally encompass smaller, as well as larger, employers across industries and occupational settings.

The present study has relied on the self-reported accounts of young queer workers. While this in itself is not a limitation, it does mean that more layered accounts of sexual diversity and sexuality-based violence and discrimination in the workplace, and its effects on young workers acclimatising to these environments, are not acknowledged. Hence, a second area for future research could be to widen the scope of the present study to include how young people, regardless of their sexual identity, experience the workplace as a sexualised and gendered space. A more specific focus would be to invite young people who do not identify with queer identities to discuss how heteronormative and homonegative practices may affect, both negatively and positively, their work-lives. For example, what might it be like for other young workers to hear and witness homonegative comments in their workplaces? This information could be generated through focus group discussions and interviews with young workers about their perceptions and experiences of topics such as sexual diversity, homophobia and working with non-heterosexual employees. This would reflect a methodological shift from focusing on sexually 'marginal' groups to examining the heterosexual centre and could provide an instructive basis for further appreciating how power-relationships are negotiated across sexualised work-relationships and cultures.

A third area for future research is to generate new knowledge of how young queer people 'recover' from homonegative violence and discrimination and reclaim their sense of self and identity post abusive experiences. This has relevance across all social settings, including the workplace. A key question to explore would be: how do encounters with homophobia, both witnessed and targeted, in one social setting, such as at work or at school, affect young people's experiences and relationships in other settings? Some further research questions to pursue include: how do young queer people respond to experiences of homonegative bullying, violence and discrimination? What are the pathways young people tread in 'recovering' from abusive treatment? How do young people endure, resist and overcome homonegative discourses? Further research in this area would assist in identifying barriers to help-seeking. It would also shed light on how young people assimilate expressions of sexual subordination as well as develop resilience and build their own resources to reject such subjectifying processes. Young people could be invited to share their encounters with homonegativity through online methods that allow them to safely compose their own stories of 'recovery' and resistance while remaining anonymous.

Revisiting the researcher's journey: A troubling account

Undertaking this study has been a troubling journey for me as the researcher and as a gay-identifying man who shares some affinity with this study's sample group. This journey has been troubling on numerous levels; these theoretical and personal tensions are not easily embraced but are still valuable points for reflection.

On a theoretical level, engaging with critical literature from queer theory and lesbian and gay studies has unsettled many of my preconceived ideas and assumptions around 'coming out', identity construction and sexuality in general. It is more accurate to think of this journey as a process of 'unlearning' rather than knowledge-acquisition—learning to rethink previous embedded assumptions that I have clung to on a personal level and on a professional level as a social worker. This process of unlearning encompasses how I perceive and name myself as a gay-identifying man, the significance of sexual identity as an essentialised self and how I have storied my own journey of 'being' and 'becoming' gay, within and beyond the workplace. At times, it has been vexing to wrestle with unfamiliar ideas about the self as a discursive construct and the significance of subjectivity. Engaging with this literature has also been a rewarding journey, dispelling some niggling doubts about what it means to 'be gay' and the limitations of identity categories, while raising new uncertainties to consider further.

Analysing the findings of this study has been a troubling journey: hearing, reading and analysing other young queer people's accounts of the workplace has been both a validating and sometimes disquieting experience. Some of these stories have resonated with aspects of my own journey and validated my own anxieties, questions and doubts about familiar circumstances, such as the silencing context of working with children and adolescents. Conversely, there are many elements within participants' stories that are far-removed from my own life history and social world. This re-emphasises the diversity of the sample group and the fragmentation of shared identity categories, such as young and queer.

Bearing witness to other young queer people's stories of the workplace as a site of exclusion, regulation and silence has been an emotionally evocative experience that has sometimes left me feeling saddened, perturbed and angered in the repeated reading of these stories. At the same time, listening to and reading over these profound stories inspires me to continue practice and research in the field of sexuality and lesbian and gay studies. These stories have also confirmed to me the significance of arising themes of social oppression, silence, invisibility, violence, and discrimination as core to social work as an applied discipline committed to social justice and change. In the Preface of this thesis, I touched on the uncertainties that have frequently accompanied me as a 'gay' author and researcher to be able to speak with confidence and be heard as a legitimate voice on a topic that converges with my own life-story. The insightful accounts of other young people in this study and the many ways in which the themes from their stories resonate with the relevant literature, gives credibility to my voice in proclaiming that this is an important story to be told and to be heard.

In closing, this research has met my two personal goals proposed in the Preface. The implications of this study clearly illustrate the transformative potential of the research for change in the workplace, and the research findings tell their own story of how workplaces can develop inclusive environments that respect and appreciate the sexual diversity of the workforce.

Concluding comments to the chapter

This thesis is in response to the identified absence of young queer people's voices in the workplace and sexuality literature. The catalyst for this study evolved from personal reflection and from existing literature that discusses the workplace as a problematic setting for queer workers, a social site of discrimination, abuse, and homophobia. The main conclusions generated from this research speak back to the literature in arguing that the workplace is experienced as considerably more than a problematic space. This research descriptively illustrates how the workplace is experienced as a multi-

dimensional space. The findings of this study generate a detailed and nuanced account of participation in organisational life that expands across the discussed dimensions of the workplace as a sexually exclusive space, a regulatory space, a silencing space, an inclusive space, and a sexually diverse space. This study has also canvassed the compounded effects of working across these five-identified dimensions; the workplace can have mutually constraining and enabling effects over young people's work and sexual lives.

The value of this study is four-fold. First, this study has illustrated the social, emotional and financial costs for some young people in identifying as queer in the workplace; these costs stem from the oppressive practices of symbolic and material violence and sexuality-based discrimination. An additional cost is the arduous labour of having to sustain sexual silence and invisibility in the workplace through adhering to processes of bodywork. Second, this study has demonstrated how the workplace can be configured as a heteronormative environment, which strengthens the heterosexual/homosexual divide across work-based relationships and dynamics. Third, a significant contribution has been made to expanding the representation of young queer people in social research. In this research-narrative, young people were represented as victims of violent and discriminatory treatment, as agents of change and resistance to homonegative discourse, and as equal and ordinary participants in the workplace. Finally, this study has highlighted the potential for workplaces to operate as sexually inclusive and therefore 'queer-friendly' environments.

Having to negotiate multiple work cultures presents complex decisions and challenges for young queer people as new entrants to the workforce. At the same time, their storied experiences of diverse work settings bring to light tentative solutions to how the workplace can effectively operate as an inclusive space and transcend social divisions between heterosexual and homosexual subjects. Indeed, the findings of this study bear numerous implications for change at a legislative and organisational level. The valuing of human diversity in the workplace, inclusive of diverse sexualities, is a complex social problem that mirrors the complexity of a socially diverse workforce. Nevertheless, embedded within this complexity is the potential to construct more equitable and harmonious workplace relations across the contested field of human sexuality.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Sample of cover letter sent to potential participants



Dear Reader

My name is Paul and I am seeking to hear a range of stories about young people's experiences of what it is like to be non-hetero in the workplace or places where people work. If you are between the ages of 16 to 26, describe yourself as non-heterosexual/not straight and have worked in casual, part-time or full-time work I am inviting you to share your stories in an online interview or through email. This research project is part of my postgraduate studies in Social Work through the University of Tasmania.

My interest in this topic has come from my own experiences of working across a mixture of workplaces. In some workplaces, I have discussed my relationships and attractions for men with other staff, in other organisations I've described myself as 'gay' or 'queer' while in some workplaces I've avoided all discussions of sexualities. These experiences have led me to wonder—how is it that I describe, perform and speak of myself, sex and sexuality in different ways in different work places and workmate relationships? And, what are other young people's experiences from their workplaces?

I am curious to hear your experiences of what it is like to be non-hetero in your previous and/or current workplaces. All stories are equally important to me and you are the expert on your own experiences. Your contribution could assist in making workplaces more supportive of people from all sexualities, plus it's an opportunity to have your story heard.

If you would like to share your story in an online interview or send in your story via email, please check out the research website for further details on the project (www.utas.edu.au/sociology/sexualities) or contact me through email Paul.Willis@utas.edu.au or through telephone (03) 6226 2715—this is my office phone so if I'm not available just leave a message for Paul. All contact with me will be private and confidential, and you do not have to use your real name if you prefer.

For further details on the project, please check out the research website—
www.utas.edu.au/sociology/sexualities. If you know any other young people who may be
interested in sharing their stories in an online interview or through email please feel free to pass
on this information and my contact details.

Thanks for your time!

Cheers,
Paul Willis

Researcher
School of Sociology and Social Work
University of Tasmania, Hobart

Appendix B: Table of recruitment pathways and sources

Table 9

The five pathways for recruiting participants to the research and the recruitment sources for each pathway

Recruitment pathways	Recruitment sources
1) Electronic postings on websites	Q-Net (Canberra queer youth website) Rainbow Visions (regional NSW) Gay and Lesbian Health Victoria Joy FM (Melbourne, Victoria) Sydney Star Observer (online) Melbourne Community Voice (online) Beyond Rainbow Eyes (national)
2) Email groups and networks	YouthGas (national network for youth service providers) Rainbow Network (Victorian queer youth service providers network) Australian Bisexual Network Equality Bulletin – Tasmanian Gay and Lesbian Rights Group Bi-Victoria (Victorian social support group for bisexuals) Bi-NSW (NSW social support group for bisexuals) National QUTE (Queer unionists in tertiary education) University of Wollongong Queer Society email list NSW Greens Party LGBTI email list QueerTas Yahoo group (Tasmanian email list)
3) Hard copy advertisements	Melbourne Community Voice (one issue) Sydney Star Observer (one issue) Laminated fliers displayed on UTas campuses (Newnham and Sandy Bay campus)

	<p>Laminated fliers displayed in university queer spaces (Melbourne University and UTas)</p> <p>‘Spectrum’ (one issue) – UTas Queer Society newsletter</p> <p>Kaos Café (Hobart, Tasmania)</p> <p>Refresh Café (Launceston, Tasmania)</p> <p>Flamingo’s night-club (Hobart, Tasmania)</p>
4) Advertisements through youth and health service providers	<p>Rainbow Network (Victorian queer youth service providers network)</p> <p>Freedom Centre (Western Australia)</p> <p>Northern Territory AIDS and Hepatitis Council</p> <p>Victorian AIDS council – youth programs</p> <p>Working it Out LGBTI support service (Tasmania)</p> <p>Women’s Health Information Service (Tasmania)</p> <p>TasCAHRD (Tasmanian Council of AIDS, Hepatitis and Related Diseases)</p> <p>GLYSSN Youth Group (Victoria)</p> <p>‘Yak’ social support group for queer youth (Melbourne)</p> <p>YouthGas (national network for youth service providers)</p>
5) Radio interviews	<p>Edge Radio (UTas community radio station)</p> <p>ABC local Radio (regional Tasmania)</p> <p>Joy FM (Melbourne, Victoria)</p>

Appendix C: Table of participants

Table 10

Participants' self-selected pseudonym, age at the time of participation and self-description of sexuality

Self-selected pseudonym	Age at the time of participation	Self-description of sexuality
Nick	18	Bisexual, 'attracted to both sexes, 'nearly gay'
Bubbles	19	Bisexual
Luke	19	Gay
Franky	20	Gay
Madeleine	20	Gay girl
Diego	20	Gay
Michael	20	Gay
Trent	21	Gay
Kat	21	Queer
Aiden	21	Queer, bisexual, gay
Alexis	21	Lesbian
Kristy	22	Lesbian
Pearson	22	Gay
Sam	22	Homosexual (1/7 heterosexual)
Peggie	23	Undefined
Ingrid	23	Gay
Kheva	23	Gay
Moskoe	23	Gay

Chester	23	Gay
Ruby	24	Queer
Alex	24	Queer, dyke, lesbian
Mia	24	Queer, lesbian
Steven	24	Gay
Jack	25	Gay
Joseph	25	Gay or queer
Powderoo	25	Lesbian
Shirley	25	Bisexual, lesbian
Tobias	25	Bisexual
Trevor	26	Gay
Bruce	26	Gay
Nadi	26	Bisexual
Jacob	26	Gay
Maree	26	Gay, lesbian
Tegan	26	Lesbian

Appendix D: Theme list and sample questions for online and face-to-face interviews

Demographic questions

- Current age
- Location of current employment – rural, regional or urban setting
- Home state – Victoria, New South Wales or Tasmania
- Previous and/or current occupations

Sexuality & gender

- How would you describe your sexuality? What words might you use?
- How would you describe your gender? What words might you use?

Opening prompts

Tell me about your experiences of the workplace....

What's it like as a non-hetero worker in your workplace?

Work roles & duties

Sample questions

- What is your current role at work? How would you describe it?
- What has been your previous role/s at work?

Entering the workforce

Sample questions

- What was it like when you started working at your first workplace?
- What age were you?

Workplace culture and environment

Sample questions

- What's it like working at your workplace?
- How would you describe the place where you work/have worked?
- What's it like as a non-hetero/not straight worker in your workplace/s?

Disclosure at work

Sample questions

- Whom in your workplace/s might you talk to about sex and sexualities? How would you select that person/s?

Workplace relationships

Sample questions

- Who has been important to you in your workplace/s? And what makes them important to you?

Challenges and difficulties in the workplace

Sample questions

- Have you encountered any difficulties in your workplace/s?
- What did you do? How did you respond?

Life outside work

Sample questions

- How do you feel about work when you are not at work?
- Whom might you talk to about work outside of work?
- Any advantages to being non-hetero at work?

Appendix E: Two extracts from online interviews

1) Sample of interview sequence with Mia

MIA says:

yep, my girlfriend picked me up... the car is at the mechanics. Luckily started going funny about 4 kms from him.

paul.willis@utas.edu.au says:

hope the repairs aint too costly

MIA says:

but home now anyway...which is good. Car will be fine. if too much to fix, ill just get rid of it. its old and hopefully next yr moving inner city so wont need it.... not to worry... How is the research coming along... im glad we finally caught up

MIA says:

haven't used msn for AGES

paul.willis@utas.edu.au says:

cheers im pleased we've met up too. Research is slowly getting there, its a much slower process that what i expected particularly locating interested participants, just takes awhile for the word to get around especially over email and net

paul.willis@utas.edu.au says:

did you want any time to get your breath back?

MIA says:

yep... i know a few good youth workers at work so one of them passed the msg on... nope its fine. im getting dinner cooked for me at the moment (yay) so have music going and relaxed on couch.

paul.willis@utas.edu.au says:

ok theres a few formal bits and pieces i need to go through with you first if that's ok....

MIA says:

thats fine...

paul.willis@utas.edu.au says:

Firstly thanks heaps for agreeing to participate in this chat, its wonderful to have your involvement - thanks for making the effort!

paul.willis@utas.edu.au says:

This online interview is voluntary, meaning you can stop or withdraw at anytime during this chat session - it's your call.

MIA says:

no probs. i think its really important firstly to further research in this area - in this empirically driven world its always imp to have 'evidence' to mount a case for things like equal rights.. and as my tutor always said (although a little corny), we are working to contribute to the abstract 'body of knowledge' out there...

MIA says:

ok.

paul.willis@utas.edu.au says:

lol absolutely, sounds like you have a wise tutor

paul.willis@utas.edu.au says:

if it suits you we'll chat for around 60 minutes today, depending on how your feeling then we may arrange to meet online another time if you feel you have more to chat about. You can stop this chat session at anytime or if you just want to take a break please let me know - I'll be guided by you.

MIA says:

thats fine...

paul.willis@utas.edu.au says:

coolies... All interviewing is done by me as well as looking over the transcript later - no one else will view this material from our chat. This transcript at the end of our chat will be saved in a Word document on my private computer and a hard copy will be locked away in a filing cabinet in my private office - again it's only me that has access to this material.

MIA says:

thats fine too - i don't mind people reading it... but i understand the privacy thing. thanks.

paul.willis@utas.edu.au says:

No probs. Any identifying material such as people's names, places or names of workplaces will be removed from your transcript once it has been saved as a Word document. I can also send you a copy of this transcript and you're more than welcome to make any further edits or changes and send it back to me. Or you can just hang onto the transcript for your own personal reference if you prefer.

2) Sample of interview sequence with Pearson

paul.willis@utas.edu.au says:

from you email it sounds like the cabin crew is a caring, supportive group of people to be part of - what makes it so caring and supportive?

Pearson says:

i think it just revolves around the sort of people we all, and working together in confined spaces for long hours and stuff... we're all overly-open about things

Pearson says:

complete different environment to the bank!

paul.willis@utas.edu.au says:

it certainly sounds different

paul.willis@utas.edu.au says:

are there any times when your fellow crew members are not-so-supportive?

Pearson says:

yeah occasionally, but then, you just dont talk to those ones!

Pearson says:

thered only be a handfull of people like that

paul.willis@utas.edu.au says:

whats it like having to be on a flight with those people?

Pearson says:

its annoying, but fine... theres other crew to talk to, so you just avoid them... those types generally keep to themselves anyway

Pearson says:

i just revert back to my bank mindset with those ones lol

paul.willis@utas.edu.au says:

lol sure

paul.willis@utas.edu.au says:

and from your email it sounds like being a gay guy is almost the norm...would you agree?

Pearson says:

god yeah

Pearson says:

200 hosteys out of our base, the majority are female, and of the 50 or so guys, there would be maybe 10 straight guys

Appendix F: Project information sheet and consent form



UNIVERSITY
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School of Sociology and Social Work

INFORMATION SHEET

Title of Project

'Sexualities at Work: Narratives of same-sex attracted youth and the negotiation of diverse sexualities in the workplace'

Name of Investigators

Chief Investigator Professor Robert Bland
 Head of Social Work Discipline
 University of Tasmania

Researcher/Interviewer Paul Willis
 PhD student in Social Work
 University of Tasmania

'What's it all about?'

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of non-heterosexual youth in their workplaces, to gather a range of stories from across a variety of workplaces. The main aim is to learn what it's like for young people who describe themselves as 'non-hetero' or 'not straight' to participate in their current and previous workplaces, and how things such as everyday relationships with workmates and work cultures impact on the health and welfare of non-hetero youth. This project is being conducted by me, Paul Willis, as part of my postgraduate studies in Social Work as a PhD student through the University of Tasmania.

'What's in it for me?'

This is an opportunity to have a voice and share your stories of what it's like to be non-hetero in your workplace. It is also a chance to make a contribution to the fields of sexuality and youth research and to social work. The findings will provide further information and understanding for other non-hetero young people entering the workforce and their supporters such as counsellors, teachers, friends and family.

‘Why me?’

I am looking for stories from around 30 young people. You do not have to be ‘out’ in your workplace to participate in this study. You are welcome to participate if you:

- Describe your sexuality as non-hetero/not straight;
- Are between the ages of 16 to 26; and
- Have worked for at least 6 months in paid employment on a casual, part-time and/or full-time basis.

It is your choice if you participate in the study; participation is voluntary and you can pull out of the interviews anytime during or after the interview.

‘What do I have to do to participate?’

You can participate in three ways:

1) You can send in your story by email

First, you need to check out the information available on the research website: www.utas.edu.au/sociology/sexualities. This requires you to then click on ‘Send in your story by email’, read over the provided information, type your story in the boxes provided and press ‘Send’ – your responses will be automatically emailed to my private email inbox. I will reply to your email within seven days to let you know I have received your responses and I may also invite you to answer some further questions—it is your choice whether you reply to this email or not. You do not have to use the boxes provided to submit your story—you can send me an email in your own words. Stories sent by email will be copied and saved into a Word document and deleted from my inbox once it has been received. You are welcome to receive a copy of this email if you wish to make any changes or edits.

You do not have to send in a consent form to send your story by email—your consent will be implied when you press ‘Send’.

2) You can chat online and share your story on Messenger

First, you need to check out the information available on the research website: www.utas.edu.au/sociology/sexualities. This requires you to click on ‘Chat to Paul in an online interview’, read over the steps and send me an email letting me know you would like to participate in an online discussion of your experiences from work. You will need to have the chat program Microsoft Messenger installed on your computer to be able to chat online – you can easily and quickly download the latest version for free online with this link <http://messenger.msn.com/>. I will contact you by replying to your email and we can plan a time that suits you to meet online in Messenger—this will be a private discussion between you and me only. Before we begin interviewing you will need to read the consent form online and, if you wish to participate, email this form to me with the words ‘I agree’ in the Subject box or on the top of the email—click on ‘Consent Form’.

In an online interview, I will ask you open and general questions about your experiences of working life as non-hetero. Each meeting will run for 30 minutes to 1 hour. We may meet two to four times if you are happy to continue chatting over a two-month period. Our chats online will be saved and pasted into a secure Word document as a transcript after each interview; you are welcome to receive a copy of this transcript and make any corrections or additions after the interviews. Your email address will be deleted from my Messenger program after our last meeting.

3) You can meet with the researcher in a face-to-face interview

This option is only for people who are currently residing in Tasmania.

This requires you to click on 'Contact Paul to arrange a face-to-face interview' or to contact me directly via email or telephone to arrange an interview. I will require a telephone number from you as well as an email address in case I need to contact you quickly. It is your choice what number you provide and when you would prefer me to call. We can meet at a time and place that is convenient to you or I can organise a private space for us to meet on campus at the University of Tasmania in Burnie, Launceston or Hobart. I am happy to travel to your location. If you wish to participate, you will need to sign and date a consent form before the interview—this is available online and I will also bring a hard copy to our meeting. We will meet for one or two interviews for 1 to 1.5 hours depending on how long it takes to share your experiences. With your permission, I will be audio recording the interview and later typing up a transcript of the interview. You are welcome to have a copy of this transcript and to make any corrections or additions.

Both online and face-to-face interviews will explore a range of topics from your workplace such as work roles, entering the workforce, any challenges at work, and workplace relationships. You can click on 'SEND IN YOUR STORY BY EMAIL' to read over the listed topics before the interviews.

'Are there any risks involved?'

There are three potential risks within this study regarding confidentiality, anonymity and risk of distress. These risks are discussed below.

'How private is the information I give?'—Confidentiality

All contact with me will be treated confidentially. All interviews will be done by me and I will transcribe all interviews. Any emails you send will be received by me. No one else will have access to this information. All transcripts, digital recordings from face-to-face interviews and discs will be kept in a locked filing cabinet or on a password-protected computer and all raw data will be wiped and destroyed after five years, as required by the Ethics Committee of the University of Tasmania.

If you do not wish anyone else around you to know you are taking part in this study it is important to consider where your computer is located and who else might be in the same building (family members, housemates, workmates etc.). If this concerns you, you may need to think about where you might keep materials such as interview transcripts, when might be an appropriate time to email or chat online and whether other people may use your computer as well.

'Will I be identifiable if I'm involved?'—Anonymity

Every attempt will be made to ensure that you remain anonymous i.e. no one can identify you as a participant. During the interviews, both online and face-to-face, you will be asked for your current age, location of employment (rural, regional or urban), home state or territory and previous and/or current occupations. These details will be removed from your individual transcript and stored separately. No other identifiable information will be requested, though sometimes when people are telling their stories some identifiable details can come out. You will have the opportunity to view your transcript or email and remove any potentially identifying details or you can ask me to edit any information from both the recording and transcripts. The final report will be written so that no one can be individually recognised. This final report or thesis will be distributed to several assessors and possibly

later published through texts and journal articles. All consent forms will be stored separate from transcripts. Throughout the interviews and in any emails you send to me you can use a false username and first name if you prefer. I will also ask you for a false name to write in the transcripts.

‘What happens if I feel upset during the interviews?’

If at any time throughout the interviews you feel upset or anxious we can stop and you can decide whether you want to continue. I am a Social Worker who has worked with young people, in particular same-sex attracted youth and I believe I have the skills to interview in a sensitive and supportive manner. There is also a national list of sexuality support services available online if you would like to contact and speak to someone else like a counsellor located near you—click on ‘Links to Useful Services and Websites’

‘Can I find out about the findings?’

I can provide you with a summary of the final results; this may take 6 to 12 months to be written after our interviews together and can be posted or emailed to you. Any comments you wish to make regarding the results would be very welcome. Your contact details for this information will be kept separate from your transcript. If you are living in Tasmania, you are welcome to attend a presentation on-campus where some of the main findings will be presented to a range of people such as service providers, counsellors, social workers and lecturers for further comments. The findings will be presented as general themes, not individual stories and you do not have to comment on your participation in anyway. I will discuss this presentation with you and provide the details later on if you decide to participate.

‘Who do I contact if I have any questions or concerns?’

This project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Tasmania. If you have any concerns regarding how this project is conducted you can contact Amanda McAully, Executive Officer of the Human Research Ethics Committee (Tasmania) Network on (03) 6226 2763 or via email Amanda.McAully@utas.edu.au. If you want to discuss this project with my supervisor and Chief Investigator Professor Robert Bland, you can contact him on (03) 6324 3528 or via email Robert.Bland@utas.edu.au. For general questions or if you want to participate in the study you can contact me via email Paul.Willis@utas.edu.au or through telephone (03) 6226 2715 – this is a shared office phone so please ask for Paul or just leave a message.

Your contact with me will be treated respectfully and with the utmost confidentiality. You can print off a copy of this information sheet and consent form if you are reading online. If we meet face-to-face, I will also give you a copy of this information sheet and the consent form to keep.

Thanks for taking the time to read this information.

Paul Willis

PhD student
Social Work

Robert Bland

Professor
Social Work



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Statement of Informed Consent

Sexualities at work: Narratives of same-sex attracted youth and the negotiation of diverse sexualities in the workplace.

1. I have read and understood the 'Information Sheet' for this study.
2. The nature and possible effects of the study have been explained to me.
3. I understand that the study involves either one of the two following procedures:
 - a) Participating in two to four online interviews for 1 to 1.5 hours
 - b) The electronic storage of these interviews
 - c) A thematic analysis of the stories told in online interviews
 - d) Distribution of the final report to several assessors and possible publication.

Or

- a) Participating in one or two face-to-face interviews for 1 to 2 hours
 - b) The audio-recording and transcribing of the interviews
 - c) A thematic analysis of the stories told in interviews
 - d) Distribution of the final report to several assessors and possible publication.
4. I understand that if I feel upset during the interview, I may stop or withdraw at anytime without any explanation or consequence. I also understand that my comments may be identified by people who know me—understand that every precaution will be taken to avoid this.
 5. I understand that all research data will be treated as confidential and will be securely stored on the University of Tasmania premises for at least five years, and will be destroyed when no longer required.
 6. Any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.
 7. I agree that the research data gathered from me for the study may be published provided that I cannot be identified as a participant.
 8. I understand that my identity will be kept confidential and that any information I supply to the researcher will be used only for the purposes of the research.
 9. I agree to participate in this study and understand that I may withdraw at any time without prejudice, and if I so wish may request that any information I have supplied to date be withdrawn from the research.

Name of participant _____

Signature of participant _____

Date _____

Statement by Investigator

I have explained this project and the implications of participation in it to this volunteer and I believe that their consent is informed and she/he understands the implications of participation.

Name of researcher Paul Willis

Signature of researcher _____

Date _____